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GRISLY GRISELL



GRISLY GISELL

OR

THE LAIDLY LADY OF WHITBURN

A TALE OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES



BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND NEW YORK

1893

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Men speak of Job, and for his humblesse,
And clerkes when hem list can well endite,
Namely of men, but as in stedfastnese
Though clerkes preis in women but a lite,
There can no man in humblesse him acquite
As women can, nor can be half so trewe
As women ben.

CHAUCER, *The Clerke's Tale*.

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William Lloyd 19 Jan 53

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CHAPTER I

AN EXPLOSION

. . . . It was great pity, so it was,
This villanous salt-petre should be digg'd
Out of the bowels of the harmless earth.

SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry IV.*, Part I.

A TERRIBLE shriek rang through the great Manor-house of Amesbury. It was preceded by a loud explosion, and there was agony as well as terror in the cry. Then followed more shrieks and screams, some of pain, some of fright, others of anger and recrimination. Every one in the house ran together to the spot whence the cries proceeded, namely, the lower court, where the armourer and blacksmith had their workshops.

There was a group of children, the young people who were confided to the great Earl Richard and Countess Alice of Salisbury for education and training. Boys and girls were alike there, some of the latter crying and sobbing, others mingling with the lads in the hot dispute as to 'who did it.'

By the time the gentle but stately Countess had reached the place, all the grown-up persons of the establishment—knights, squires, grooms, scullions, and females of every degree—had thronged round them, but parted at her approach, though one of the knights said, 'Nay, Lady Countess, 'tis no sight for you. The poor little maid is dead, or nigh upon it.'

'But who is it? What is it?' asked the Countess, still advancing.

A confused medley of voices replied, 'The Lord

of Whitburn's little wench—Leonard Copeland—gunpowder.'

'And no marvel,' said a sturdy, begrimed figure, 'if the malapert young gentles be let to run all over the courts, and handle that with which they have no concern, lads and wenches alike.'

'Nay, how can I stop it when my lady will not have the maidens kept ever at their distaffs and needles in seemly fashion?' cried a small but stout and self-assertive dame, known as 'Mother of the Maidens;' then starting, 'Oh! my lady, I crave your pardon, I knew not you were in this coil! And if the men-at-arms be let to have their perilous goods strewn all over the place, no wonder at any mishap.'

'Do not wrangle about the cause,' said the Countess. 'Who is hurt? How much?'

The crowd parted enough for her to make way to where a girl of about ten was lying prostrate and bleeding with her head on a woman's lap.

'Poor maid,' was the cry, 'poor maid! 'Tis all over with her. It will go ill with young Leonard Copeland.'

'Worse with Hodge Smith for letting him touch his irons.'

'Nay, what call had Dick Jenner to lay his foul, burning gunpowder—a device of Satan—in this yard? A mercy we are not all blown to the winds.'

The Countess, again ordering peace, reached the girl, whose moans showed that she was still alive, and between the barber-surgeon and the porter's wife she was lifted up, and carried to a bed, the Countess Alice keeping close to her, though the

‘Mother of the Maidens,’ who was a somewhat helpless personage, hung back, declaring that the sight of the wounds made her swoon. There were terrible wounds upon the face and neck, which seemed to be almost bared of skin. The lady, who had been bred to some knowledge of surgical skill, together with the barber-surgeon, did their best to allay the agony with applications of sweet oil. Perhaps if they had had more of what was then considered skill, it might have been worse for her.

The Countess remained anxiously trying all that could allay the suffering of the poor little semi-conscious patient, who kept moaning for ‘nurse.’ She was Grisell Dacre, the daughter of the Baron of Whitburn, and had been placed, young as she was, in the household of the Countess of Salisbury

on her mother being made one of the ladies attending on the young Queen Margaret of Anjou, lately married to King Henry VI.

Attendance on the patient had prevented the Countess from hearing the history of the accident, but presently the clatter of horses' feet showed that her lord was returning, and, committing the girl to her old nurse, she went down to the hall to receive him.

The grave, grizzled warrior had taken his seat on his cross-legged, round-backed chair, and a boy of some twelve years old stood before him, in a sullen attitude, one foot over the other, and his shoulder held fast by a squire, while the motley crowd of retainers stood behind.

There was a move at the entrance of the lady, and her husband rose, came forward, and as he

gave her the courteous kiss of greeting, demanded,
‘What is all this coil? Is the little wench dead?’

‘Nay, but I fear me she cannot live,’ was the answer.

‘Will Dacre of Whitburn’s maid? That’s ill, poor child! How fell it out?’

‘That I know as little as you,’ was the answer.
‘I have been seeing to the poor little maid’s hurts.’

Lord Salisbury placed her in the chair like his own. In point of fact, she was Countess in her own right; he, Richard Nevil, had been created Earl of Salisbury in her right on the death of her father, the staunch warrior of Henry V. in the siege of Orleans.

‘Speak out, Leonard Copeland,’ said the Earl.
‘What hast thou done?’

The boy only growled, 'I never meant to hurt the maid.'

'Speak to the point, sir,' said Lord Salisbury sternly ; 'give yourself at least the grace of truth.'

Leonard grew more silent under the show of displeasure, and only hung his head at the repeated calls to him to speak. The Earl turned to those who were only too eager to accuse him.

'He took a bar of iron from the forge, so please you, my lord, and put it to the barrel of powder.'

'Is this true, Leonard?' demanded the Earl again, amazed at the frantic proceeding, and Leonard muttered 'Ay,' vouchsafing no more, and looking black as thunder at a fair, handsome boy who pressed to his side and said, 'Uncle,' doffing his cap, 'so please you, my lord, the barrels had just been brought in upon Hob

Carter's wain, and Leonard said they ought to have the Lord Earl's arms on them. So he took a bar of hot iron from the forge to mark the saltire on them, and thereupon there was this burst of smoke and flame, and the maid, who was leaning over, prying into his doings, had the brunt thereof.'

'Thanks to the saints that no further harm was done,' ejaculated the lady shuddering, while her lord proceeded—'It was not malice, but malapert meddling, then. Master Leonard Copeland, thou must be scourged to make thee keep thine hands off where they be not needed. For the rest, thou must await what my Lord of Whitburn may require. Take him away, John Ellerby, chastise him, and keep him in ward till we see the issue.'

Leonard, with his head on high, marched out

of the hall, not uttering a word, but shaking his shoulder as if to get rid of the squire's grasp, but only thereby causing himself to be gripped the faster.

Next, Lord Salisbury's severity fell upon Hob the carter and Hodge the smith, for leaving such perilous wares unwatched in the court-yard. Servants were not dismissed for carelessness in those days, but soundly flogged, a punishment considered suitable to the 'black-guard' at any age, even under the mildest rule. The gunner, being somewhat higher in position, and not in charge at the moment, was not called to account; but the next question was, how the 'Mother of the Maids'—the *gouvernante* in charge of the numerous damsels who formed the train of the Lady of Salisbury, and were under educa-

tion and training—could have permitted her maidens to stray into the regions appropriated to the yeomen and archers, and others of the *meiné*, where they certainly had no business.

It appeared that the good and portly lady had last seen the girls in the gardens ‘a playing at the ball’ with some of the pages, and that there, on a sunny garden seat, slumber had prevented her from discovering the absence of the younger part of the bevy. The demure elder damsels deposed that, at the sound of wains coming into the court, the boys had rushed off, and the younger girls had followed them, whether with or without warning was not made clear. Poor little Grisell’s condition might have been considered a sufficient warning, nevertheless the two companions in her misdemeanour were condemned

to a whipping, to enforce on them a lesson of maidenliness; and though the Mother of the Maids could not partake of the flagellation, she remained under her lord's and lady's grave displeasure, and probably would have to submit to a severe penance from the priest for her carelessness. Yet, as she observed, Mistress Grisell was a North Country maid, never couthly or conformable, but like a boy, who would moreover always be after Leonard Copeland, whether he would or no.

It was the more unfortunate, as Lord Salisbury lamented to his wife, because the Copelands were devoted to the Somerset faction; and the King had been labouring to reconcile them to the Dacres, and to bring about a contract of marriage between these two unfortunate children, but he

feared that whatever he could do, there would only be additional feud and bitterness, though it was clear that the mishap was accidental. The Lord of Whitburn himself was in Ireland with the Duke of York, while his lady was in attendance on the young Queen, and it was judged right and seemly to despatch to her a courier with the tidings of her daughter's disaster, although in point of fact, where a house could number sons, damsels were not thought of great value, except as the means of being allied with other houses. A message was also sent to Sir William Copeland that his son had been the death of the daughter of Whitburn; for poor little Grisell lay moaning in a state of much fever and great suffering, so that the Lady Salisbury could not look at her, nor hear her sighs and

sobs, without tears, and the barber - surgeon, unaccustomed to the effects of gunpowder, had little or no hope of her life.

Leonard Copeland's mood was sullen, not to say surly. He submitted to the chastisement without a word or cry, for blows were the lot of boys of all ranks, and were dealt out without much respect to justice; and he also had to endure a sort of captivity, in a dismal little circular room in a turret of the manorial house, with merely a narrow loophole to look out from, and this was only accessible by climbing up a steep broken slope of brick-work in the thickness of the wall.

Here, however, he was visited by his chief friend and comrade, Edmund Plantagenet of York, who found him lying on the floor, building up

fragments of stone and mortar into the plan of a castle.

‘How dost thou, Leonard?’ he asked. ‘Did old Hal strike very hard?’

‘I reckon not,’ growled Leonard.

‘How long will my uncle keep thee here?’ asked Edmund sympathisingly.

‘Till my father comes, unless the foolish wench should go and die. She brought it on me, the peevish girl. She is always after me when I want her least.’

‘Yea, is not she contracted to thee?’

‘So they say; but at least this puts a stop to my being plagued with her—do what they may to me. There’s an end to it, if I hang for it.’

‘They would never hang thee.’

‘None knows what you traitor folk of Nevil would do to a loyal house,’ growled Leonard.

‘Traitor, saidst thou,’ cried Edmund, clenching his fists. ‘’Tis thy base Somerset crew that be the traitors.’

‘I’ll brook no such word from thee,’ burst forth Leonard, flying at him.

‘Ha! ha!’ laughed Edmund even as they grappled. ‘Who is the traitor forsooth? Why, ’tis my father who should be King. ’Tis white-faced Harry and his Beauforts——’

The words were cut short by a blow from Leonard, and the warder presently found the two boys rolling on the floor together in hot contest.

And meanwhile poor Grisell was trying to frame with her torn and flayed cheeks and lips, ‘O lady, lady, visit it not on him! Let not

Leonard be punished. It was my fault for getting into his way when I should have been in the garden. Dear Madge, canst thou speak for him ?'

Madge was Edmund's sister, Margaret of York, who stood trembling and crying by Grisell's bed.

CHAPTER II

THE BROKEN MATCH

The Earl of Salisbury, called Prudence.

Contemporary Poem.

LITTLE Grisell Dacre did not die, though day after day she lay in a suffering condition, tenderly watched over by the Countess Alice. Her mother had been summoned from attendance on the Queen, but at first there only was returned a message that if the maid was dead she should be embalmed and sent north to be buried in the family vault, when her father would be at all charges. Moreover, that the boy should be called to account for his crime,

his father being, as the Lady of Whitburn caused to be written, an evil-minded minion and fosterer of the house of Somerset, the very bane of the King and the enemies of the noble Duke of York and Earl of Warwick.

The story will be clearer if it is understood that the Earl of Salisbury was Richard Nevil, one of the large family of Nevil of Raby Castle in Westmoreland, and had obtained his title by marriage with Alice Montagu, heiress of that earldom. His youngest sister had married Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, who being descended from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, was considered to have a better right to the throne than the house of Lancaster, though this had never been put forward since the earlier years of Henry V.

Salisbury had several sons. The eldest had married Anne Beauchamp, and was in her right Earl of Warwick, and had estates larger even than those of his father. He had not, however, as yet come forward, and the disputes at Court were running high between the friends of the Duke of Somerset and those of the Duke of York.

The King and Queen both were known to prefer the house of Somerset, who were the more nearly related to Henry, and the more inclined to uphold royalty, while York was considered as the champion of the people. The gentle King and the Beauforts wished for peace with France; the nation, and with them York, thought this was giving up honour, land, and plunder, and suspected the Queen, as a Frenchwoman, of truckling to the enemy. Jack Cade's rising and the murder of

the Duke of Suffolk had been the outcome of this feeling. Indeed, Lord Salisbury's messenger reported the country about London to be in so disturbed a state that it was no wonder that the Lady of Whitburn did not make the journey. She was not, as the Countess suspected, a very tender mother. Grisell's moans were far more frequently for her nurse than for her, but after some space they ceased. The child became capable of opening first one eye, then the other, and both barber and lady perceived that she was really unscathed in any vital part, and was on the way to recovery, though apparently with hopelessly injured features.

Leonard Copeland had already been released from restraint, and allowed to resume his usual place among the Earl's pages; when the warder

announced that he saw two parties approaching from opposite sides of the down, one as if from Salisbury, the other from the north ; and presently he reported that the former wore the family badge, a white rosette, the latter none at all, whence it was perceived that the latter were adherents of the Beauforts of Somerset, for though the 'Rose of Snow' had been already adopted by York, Somerset had in point of fact not plucked the Red Rose in the Temple gardens, nor was it as yet the badge of Lancaster.

Presently it was further reported that the Lady of Whitburn was in the fore front of the party, and the Lord of Salisbury hastened to receive her at the gates, his suite being rapidly put into some order.

She was a tall, rugged-faced North Country

dame, not very smoooth of speech, and she returned his salute with somewhat rough courtesy, demanding as she sprang off her horse with little aid, 'Lives my wench still?'

'Yes, madam, she lives, and the leech trusts that she will yet be healed.'

'Ah! Methought you would have sent to me if aught further had befallen her. Be that as it may, no doubt you have given the malapert boy his deserts.'

'I hope I have, madam,' began the Earl. 'I kept him in close ward while she was in peril of death, but——' A fresh bugle blast interrupted him, as there clattered through the resounding gate the other troop, at sight of whom the Lady of Whitburn drew herself up, redoubling her grim dignity, and turning it into indignation as a

young page rushed forward to meet the newcomers, with a cry of 'Father! Lord Father, come at last;' then composing himself, doffed his cap and held the stirrup, then bent a knee for his father's blessing.

'You told me, Lord Earl, the mischievous, murderous fellow was in safe hold,' said the lady, bending her dark brows.

'While the maid was in peril,' hastily answered Salisbury. 'Pardon me, madam, my Countess will attend you.'

The Countess's high rank and great power were impressive to the Baroness of Whitburn, who bent in salutation, but almost her first words were, 'Madam, you at least will not let the murderous traitors of Somerset and the Queen prevail over the loyal friends of York and the nation.'

‘There is happily no murder in the case. Praise be to the saints,’ said Countess Alice, ‘your little maid——’

‘Ay, that’s what they said as to the poor good Duke Humfrey,’ returned the irate lady; ‘but that you, madam, the good-sister of the noble York, should stand up for the enemies of him, and the friends of France, is more than a plain North Country woman like me can understand. And there—there, turning round upon the steep steps, there is my Lord Earl hand and glove with that minion fellow of Somerset, who was no doubt at the bottom of the plot! None would believe it at Raby.’

‘None at Raby would believe that my lord could be lacking in courtesy to a guest,’ returned Lady Salisbury with dignity, ‘nor that a North

Country dame could expect it of him. Those who are under his roof must respect it by fitting demeanour towards one another.'

The Lady of Whitburn was quenched for the time, and the Countess asked whether she did not wish to see her daughter, leading the way to a chamber hung with tapestry, and with a great curtained bed nearly filling it up, for the patient had been installed in one of the best guest-chambers of the Castle. Lady Whitburn was surprised, but was too proud to show herself gratified by what she thought was the due of the dignity of the Dacres. An old woman in a hood sat by the bed, where there was a heap of clothes, and a dark-haired little girl stood by the window, whence she had been describing the arrivals in the Castle court.

‘Here is your mother, my poor child,’ began the Lady of Salisbury, but there was no token of joy. Grisell gave a little gasp, and tried to say ‘Lady Mother, pardon——’ but the Lady of Whitburn, at sight of the reddened half of the face which alone was as yet visible, gave a cry, ‘She will be a fright! You evil little baggage, thus to get yourself scarred and made hideous! Running where you ought not, I warrant!’ and she put out her hand as if to shake the patient, but the Countess interposed, and her niece Margaret gave a little cry. ‘Grisell is still very weak and feeble! She cannot bear much; we have only just by Heaven’s grace brought her round.’

‘As well she were dead as like this,’ cried this untender parent. ‘Who is to find her a

husband now? and as to a nunnery, where is one to take her without a dower such as is hard to find, with two sons to be fitly provided? I looked that in a household like this, better rule should be kept.'

'None can mourn it more than myself and the Earl,' said the gentle Countess; 'but young folks can scarce be watched hour by hour.'

'The rod is all that is good for them, and I trusted to you to give it them, madam,' said Lady Whitburn. 'Now, the least that can be done is to force yonder malapert lad and his father into keeping his contract to her, since he has spoilt the market for any other.'

'Is he contracted to her?' asked the Countess.

'Not fully; but as you know yourself, lady,

your lord, and the King, and all the rest, thought to heal the breach between the houses by planning a contract between their son and my daughter. He shall keep it now, at his peril.'

Grisell was cowering among her pillows, and no one knew how much she heard or understood. The Countess was glad to get Lady Whitburn out of the room, but both she and her Earl had a very trying evening, in trying to keep the peace between the two parents. Sir William Copeland was devoted to the Somerset family, of whom he held his manor; and had had a furious quarrel with the Baron of Whitburn, when both were serving in France.

The gentle King had tried to bring about

a reconciliation, and had induced the two fathers to consent to a contract for the future marriage of Leonard, Copeland's second son, to Grisell Dacre, then the only child of the Lord of Whitburn. He had also obtained that the two children should be bred up in the household of the Earl of Salisbury, by way of letting them grow up together. On the same principle the Lady of Whitburn had been made one of the attendants of Queen Margaret—but neither arrangement had been more successful than most of those of poor King Henry.

Grisell indeed considered Leonard as a sort of property of hers, but she beset him in the manner that boys are apt to resent from younger girls, and when he was thirteen, and

she ten years old, there was very little affection on his side. Moreover, the birth of two brothers had rendered Grisell's hand a far less desirable prize in the eyes of the Copelands.

To attend on the Court was penance to the North Country dame, used to a hardy rough life in her sea-side tower, with absolute rule, and no hand over her save her husband's; while the young and outspoken Queen, bred up in the graceful, poetical Court of Aix or Nancy, looked on her as no better than a barbarian, and if she did not show this openly, reporters were not wanting to tell her that the Queen called her the great northern hag, or that her rugged unwilling curtsy was said to look as if she were stooping to draw water at a well. Her husband had kept her in some restraint, but when he had

gone to Ireland with the Duke of York, offences seemed to multiply upon her. The last had been that when she had tripped on her train, dropped the salver wherewith she was serving the Queen, and broken out with a loud 'Lawk a daisy!' all the ladies, and Margaret herself, had gone into fits of uncontrollable laughter, and the Queen had begged her to render her exclamation into good French for her benefit.

'Madam,' she had exclaimed, 'if a plain woman's plain English be not good enough for you, she can have no call here!' And without further ceremony she had flown out of the royal presence.

Margaret of Anjou, naturally offended, and never politic, had sent her a message, that her

attendance was no longer required. So here she was going out of her way to make a casual inquiry, from the Court at Winchester, whether that very unimportant article, her only daughter, were dead or alive.

The Earl absolutely prohibited all conversation on affairs in debate during the supper which was spread in the hall, with quite as much state as, and even greater profusion and splendour, than was to be found at Windsor, Winchester, or Westminster. All the high-born sat on the dais, raised on two steps with gorgeous tapestry behind, and a canopy overhead ; the Earl and Countess on chairs in the centre of the long narrow table. Lady Whitburn sat beside the Earl, Sir William Copeland by the Countess, watching with pleasure how deftly his son ran about among the pages, carrying the

trenchers of food, and the cups. He entered on a conversation with the Countess, telling her of the King's interest and delight in his beautiful freshly-founded Colleges at Eton and Cambridge, how the King rode down whenever he could to see the boys, listen to them at their tasks in the cloisters, watch them at their sports in the playing fields, and join in their devotions in the Chapel—a most holy example for them.

‘Ay, for such as seek to be monks and shavelings,’ broke in the North Country voice sarcastically.

‘There are others—sons of gentlemen and esquires—lodged in houses around,’ said Sir William, ‘who are not meant for cowl or for mass-priests.’

‘Yea, forsooth,’ called Lady Whitburn across

the Earl and Countess, 'what for but to make them as feckless as the priests, unfit to handle lance or sword!'

'So, lady, you think that the same hand cannot wield pen and lance,' said the Earl.

'I should like to see one of your clerks on a Border foray,' laughed the Dame of Dacre. 'Tis all a device of the Frenchwoman!'

'Verily?' said the Earl, in an interrogative tone.

'Ay, to take away the strength and might of Englishmen with this clerkly lore, so that her folk may have the better of them in France; and the poor, witless King gives in to her. And so while the Beauforts rule the roast——'

Salisbury caught her up. 'Ay, the roast. Will you partake of these roast partridges, madam?'

They were brought round skewered on a long

spit, held by a page for the guest to help herself. Whether by her awkwardness or that of the boy, it so chanced that the bird made a sudden leap from the impalement, and deposited itself in the lap of Lady Whitburn's scarlet kirtle! The fact was proclaimed by her loud rude cry, 'A murrain on thee, thou ne'er-do-weel lad,' together with a sounding box on the ear.

'Tis thine own greed, who dost not——'

'Leonard, be still—know thy manners,' cried both at once the Earl and Sir William, for, unfortunately, the offender was no other than Leonard Copeland, and, contrary to all the laws of pagedom, he was too angry not to argue the point. 'Twas no doing of mine! She knew not how to cut the bird.'

Answering again was a far greater fault than

the first, and his father only treated it as his just desert when he was ordered off under the squire in charge to be soundly scourged, all the more sharply for his continuing to mutter, 'It was her fault.'

And sore and furrowed as was his back, he continued to exclaim, when his friend Edmund of York came to condole with him as usual in all his scrapes, 'Tis she that should have been scourged for clumsiness! A foul, uncouth Border dame! Well, one blessing at least is that now I shall never be wedded to her daughter—let the wench live or die as she lists!'

That was not by any means the opinion of the Lady of Whitburn, and no sooner was the meal ended than, in the midst of the hall, the debate began, the Lady declaring that in all honour Sir

William Copeland was bound to affiance his son instantly to her poor daughter, all the more since the injuries he had inflicted to her face could never be done away with. On the other hand, Sir William Copeland was naturally far less likely to accept such a daughter-in-law, since her chances of being an heiress had ceased, and he contended that he had never absolutely accepted the contract, and that there had been no betrothal of the children.

The Earl of Salisbury could not but think that a strictly honourable man would have felt poor Grisell's disaster inflicted by his son's hands all the more reason for holding to the former understanding; but the loud clamours and rude language of Lady Whitburn were enough to set any one in opposition to her,

and moreover, the words he said in favour of her side of the question appeared to Copeland merely spoken out of the general enmity of the Nevils to the Beauforts and all their following.

Thus, all the evening Lady Whitburn raged, and appealed to the Earl, whose support she thought cool and unfriendly, while Copeland stood sullen and silent, but determined.

‘My lord,’ she said, ‘were you a true friend to York and Raby, you would deal with this scowling fellow as we should on the Border.’

‘We are not on the Border, madam,’ quietly said Salisbury.

‘But you are in your own Castle, and can force him to keep faith. No contract, forsooth! I hate your mincing South Country forms of law.’

Then perhaps irritated by a little ironical smile which Salisbury could not suppress. 'Is this your castle, or is it not? Then bring him and his lad to my poor wench's side, and see their troth plighted, or lay him by the heels in the lowest cell in your dungeon. Then will you do good service to the King and the Duke of York, whom you talk of loving in your shilly-shally fashion.'

'Madam,' said the Earl, his grave tones coming in contrast to the shrill notes of the angry woman, 'I counsel you, in the south at least, to have some respect to these same forms of law. I bid you a fair good-night. The chamberlain will marshal you.'

CHAPTER III

THE MIRROR

‘Of all the maids, the foulest maid

From Teviot unto Dee.

Ah!’ sighing said that lady then,

‘Can ne’er young Harden’s be.’

SCOTT, *The Reiver’s Wedding*.

‘THEY are gone,’ said Margaret of York, standing half dressed at the deep-set window of the chamber where Grisell lay in state in her big bed.

‘Who are gone?’ asked Grisell, turning as well as she could under the great heraldically-embroidered covering.

‘Leonard Copeland and his father. Didst not hear the horses’ tramp in the court?’

‘I thought it was only my lord’s horses going to the water.’

‘It was the Copelands going off without breaking their fast or taking a stirrup cup, like discourteous rogues as they be,’ said Margaret, in no measured language.

‘And are they gone? And wherefore?’ asked Grisell.

‘Wherefore? but for fear my noble uncle of Salisbury should hold them to their contract. Sir William sat as surly as a bear just about to be baited, while thy mother rated and raved at him like a very sleuth-hound on the chase. And Leonard—what think’st thou he saith? “That he would as soon wed the loathly lady as thee,” the cruel Somerset villain as he is; and yet my brother Edmund is fain to love him. So off

they are gone, like recreant curs as they are, lest my uncle should make them hear reason.'

'But Lady Madge, dear Lady Madge, am I so very loathly?' asked poor Grisell.

'Mine aunt of Salisbury bade that none should tell thee,' responded Margaret, in some confusion.

'Ah me! I must know sooner or later! My mother, she shrieked at sight of me!'

'I would not have your mother,' said the outspoken daughter of 'proud Cis.' 'My Lady Duchess mother is stern enough if we do not bridle our heads, and if we make ourselves too friendly with the *meiné*, but she never frets nor rates us, and does not heed so long as we do not demean ourselves unlike our royal blood. She is no termagant like yours.'

It was not polite, but Grisell had not seen enough of her mother to be very sensitive on her account. In fact, she was chiefly occupied with what she had heard about her own appearance—a matter which had not occurred to her before in all her suffering. She returned again to entreat Margaret to tell her whether she was so foully ill-favoured that no one could look at her, and the young damsel of York, adhering to the letter rather than the spirit of the cautions which she had received, pursed up her lips and reiterated that she had been commanded not to mention the subject.

‘Then,’ entreated Grisell, ‘do—do, dear Madge—only bring me the little hand mirror out of my Lady Countess’s chamber.’

‘I know not that I can or may.’

‘Only for the space of one Ave,’ reiterated Grisell.

‘My lady aunt would never——’

‘There — hark — there’s the bell for mass. Thou canst run into her chamber when she and the tirewomen are gone down.’

‘But I must be there.’

‘Thou canst catch them up after. They will only think thee a slug-a-bed. Madge, dear Madge, prithee, I cannot rest without. Weeping will be worse for me.’

She was crying, and caressing Margaret so vehemently that she gained her point. Indeed the other girl was afraid of her sobs being heard, and inquired into, and therefore promised to make the attempt, keeping a watch out of sight till she had seen the Lady of Salisbury in her

padded headgear of gold net, and long purple train, sweep down the stair, followed by her tirewomen and maidens of every degree. Then darting into the chamber, she bore away from a stage where lay the articles of the toilette, a little silver-backed and handled Venetian mirror, with beautiful tracery in silvered glass diminishing the very small oval left for personal reflection and inspection. That, however, was quite enough and too much for poor Grisell when Lady Margaret had thrown it to her on her bed, and rushed down the stair so as to come in the rear of the household just in time.

A glance at the mirror disclosed, not the fair rosy face, set in light yellow curls, that Grisell had now and then peeped at in a bucket of water or a polished breast-plate, but a piteous sight.

One half, as she expected, was hidden by bandages, but the other was fiery red, except that from the corner of the eye to the ear there was a purple scar; the upper lip was distorted, the hair, eyebrows, and lashes were all gone! The poor child was found in an agony of sobbing when, after the service, the old woman who acted as her nurse came stumping up in her wooden clogs to set the chamber and bed in order for Lady Whitburn's visit.

The dame was in hot haste to get home. Rumours were rife as to Scottish invasions, and her tower was not too far south not to need to be on its guard. Her plan was to pack Grisell on a small litter slung to a sumpter mule, and she snorted a kind of defiant contempt when the Countess, backed by the household barber-surgeon,

declared the proceeding barbarous and impossible. Indeed she had probably forgotten that Grisell was far too tall to be made up into the bundle she intended ; but she then declared that the wench might ride pillion behind old Diccon, and she would not be convinced till she was taken up to the sick chamber. There the first sound that greeted them was a choking agony of sobs and moans, while the tirewoman stood over the bed, exclaiming, ‘ Ay, no wonder ; it serves thee right, thou evil wench, filching my Lady Countess’s mirror from her very chamber, when it might have been broken for all thanks to thee. The Venice glass that the merchant gave her ! Thou art not so fair a sight, I trow, as to be in haste to see thyself. At the bottom of all the scathe in the Castle ! We shall be well rid of thee.’

So loud was the objurgation of the tirewoman that she did not hear the approach of her mistress, nor indeed the first words of the Countess, 'Hush, Maudlin, the poor child is not to be thus rated! Silence!'

'See, my lady, what she has done to your ladyship's Venice glass, which she never should have touched. She must have run to your chamber while you were at mass. All false her feigning to be so sick and feeble.'

'Ay,' replied Lady Whitburn, 'she must up—don her clothes, and away with me.'

'Hush, I pray you, madam. How, how, Grisell, my poor child. Call Master Miles, Maudlin! Give me that water.' The Countess was raising the poor child in her arms, and against her bosom, for the shock of that glance in the mirror,

followed by the maid's harsh reproaches, and fright at the arrival of the two ladies, had brought on a choking, hysterical sort of convulsive fit, and the poor girl writhed and gasped on Lady Salisbury's breast, while her mother exclaimed, 'Heed her not, Lady ; it is all put on to hinder me from taking her home. If she could go stealing to your room——'

'No, no,' broke out a weeping, frightened voice. 'It was I, Lady Aunt. You bade me never tell her how her poor face looked, and when she begged and prayed me, I did not say, but I fetched the mirror. Oh! oh! It has not been the death of her.'

'Nay, nay, by God's blessing! Take away the glass, Margaret. Go and tell thy beads, child; thou hast done much scathe unwittingly! Ah,

Master Miles, come to the poor maid's aid. Canst do aught for her?'

'These humours must be drawn off, my lady,' said the barber-surgeon, who advanced to the bed, and felt the pulse of the poor little patient. 'I must let her blood.'

Maudlin, whose charge she was, came to his help, and Countess Alice still held her up, while, after the practice of those days, he bled the already almost unconscious child, till she fainted and was laid down again on her pillows, under the keeping of Maudlin, while the clanging of the great bell called the family down to the meal which broke fast, whether to be called breakfast or dinner.

It was plain that Grisell was in no state to be taken on a journey, and her mother went

grumbling down the stair at the unchancy bairn always doing scathe.

Lord Salisbury, beside whom she sat, courteously, though perhaps hardly willingly, invited her to remain till her daughter was ready to move.

‘Nay, my Lord, I am beholden to you, but I may scarce do that. I be sorely needed at Whitburn Tower. The knaves go all agee when both my lord and myself have our backs turned, and my lad bairns—worth a dozen of yon whining maid—should no longer be left to old Cuthbert Ridley and Nurse. Now the Queen and Somerset have their way ’tis all misrule, and who knows what the Scots may do?’

‘There are Nevils and Dacres enough between Whitburn and the Border,’ observed the Earl gravely. However, the visitor was not such an

agreeable one as to make him anxious to press her stay beyond what hospitality demanded, and his wife could not bear to think of giving over her poor little patient to such usage as she would have met with on the journey.

Lady Whitburn was overheard saying that those who had mauled the maid might mend her, if they could ; and accordingly she acquiesced, not too graciously, when the Countess promised to tend the child like her own, and send her by and by to Whitburn under a safe escort ; and as Middleham Castle lay on the way to Whitburn, it was likely that means would be found of bringing or sending her.

This settled, Lady Whitburn was restless to depart, so as to reach a hostel before night.

She donned her camlet cloak and hood, and

looked once more in upon Grisell, who after her loss of blood, had, on reviving, been made to swallow a draught of which an infusion of poppy-heads formed a great part, so that she lay, breathing heavily, in a deep sleep, moaning now and then. Her mother did not scruple to try to rouse her with calls of 'Grizzy! Look up, wench!' but could elicit nothing but a half-turn on the pillow, and a little louder moan, and Master Miles, who was still watching, absolutely refused to let his patient be touched or shaken.

'Well a day!' said Lady Whitburn, softened for a moment, 'what the Saints will must be, I trow ; but it is hard, and I shall let St. Cuthbert of Durham know it, that after all the candles I have given him, he should have let my poor maid be so mauled and marred, and then forsaken

by the rascal who did it, so that she will never be aught but a dead weight on my two fair sons ! The least he can do for me now is to give me my revenge upon that lurdane runaway knight and his son. But he hath no care for lasses. Mayhap St. Hilda may serve me better.'

Wherewith the Lady of Whitburn tramped down stairs. It may be feared that in the ignorance in which northern valleys were left she was very little more enlightened in her ideas of what would please the Saints, or what they could do for her, than were the old heathen of some unknown antiquity who used to worship in the mysterious circles of stones which lay on the downs of Amesbury.

CHAPTER IV

PARTING

There in the holy house at Almesbury
Weeping, none with her save a little maid.

TENNYSON, *Idylls of the King*.

THE agitations of that day had made Grisell so much worse that her mind hardly awoke again to anything but present suffering from fever, and in consequence the aggravation of the wounds on her neck and cheek. She used to moan now and then 'Don't take me away!' or cower in terror, 'She is coming!' being her cry, or sometimes 'So foul and loathly.' She hung again between life and death, and most of those around thought

death would be far better for the poor child, but the Countess and the Chaplain still held to the faith that she must be reserved for some great purpose if she survived so much.

Great families with all their train used to move from one castle or manor to another so soon as they had eaten up all the produce of one place, and the time had come when the Nevils must perforce quit Amesbury. Grisell was in no state for a long journey ; she was exceedingly weak, and as fast as one wound in her face and neck healed another began to break out, so that often she could hardly eat, and whether she would ever have the use of her left eye was doubtful.

Master Miles was at his wits' end, Maudlin was weary of waiting on her, and so in truth was every one except the good Countess, and

she could not always be with the sufferer, nor could she carry such a patient to London, whither her lord was summoned to support his brother-in-law, the Duke of York, against the Duke of Somerset.

The only delay was caused by the having to receive the newly-appointed Bishop, Richard Beauchamp, who had been translated from his former see at Hereford on the murder of his predecessor, William Ayscough, by some of Jack Cade's party.

In full splendour he came, with a train of chaplains and cross-bearers, and the clergy of Salisbury sent a deputation to meet him, and to arrange with him for his reception and installation. It was then that the Countess heard that there was a nun at Wilton Abbey so skilled in the

treatment of wounds and sores that she was thought to work miracles, being likewise a very holy woman.

The Earl and Countess would accompany the new bishop to be present at his enthronement and the ensuing banquet, and the lady made this an opportunity of riding to the convent on her way back, consulting the Abbess, whom she had long known, and likewise seeing Sister Avice, and requesting that her poor little guest might be received and treated there.

There was no chance of a refusal, for the great nobles were sovereigns in their own domains ; the Countess owned half Wiltshire, and was much loved and honoured in all the religious houses for her devotion and beneficence.

The nuns were only too happy to undertake to

receive the demoiselle Grisell Dacre of Whitburn, or any other whom my Lady Countess would entrust to them, and the Abbess had no doubt that Sister Avice could effect a cure.

Lady Salisbury dreaded that Grisell should lie awake all night crying, so she said nothing till her whirlicote, as the carriage of those days was called, was actually being prepared, and then she went to the chamber where the poor child had spent five months, and where she was now sitting dressed, but propped up on a sort of settle, and with half her face still bandaged.

‘My little maid, this is well,’ said the Countess. ‘Come with me. I am going to take thee to a kind and holy dame who will, I trust, with the blessing of Heaven, be able to heal thee better than we have done.’

‘Oh, lady, lady, do not send me away!’ cried Grisell; ‘not from you and Madge.’

‘My child, I must do so; I am going away myself, with my lord, and Madge is to go back with her brother to her father the Duke. Thou couldst not brook the journey, and I will take thee myself to the good Sister Avice.’

‘A nun, a nunnery,’ sighed Grisell. ‘Oh! I shall be mewed up there and never come forth again! Do not, I pray, do not, good my lady, send me thither!’

Perhaps my lady thought that to remain for life in a convent might be the fate, and perhaps the happiest, of the poor blighted girl, but she only told her that there was no reason she should not leave Wilton, as she was not put here to take the vows, but only to be cured.

Long nursing had made Grisell unreasonable, and she cried as much as she dared over the order; but no child ventured to make much resistance to elders in those days, and especially not to the Countess, so Grisell, a very poor little wasted being, was carried down, and only delayed in the hall for an affectionate kiss from Margaret of York.

‘And here is a keepsake, Grisell,’ she said. ‘Mine own beauteous pouncet box, with the forget-me-nots in turquoises round each little hole!’

‘I will keep it for ever,’ said Grisell, and they parted, but not as girls part who hope to meet again, and can write letters constantly, but with tearful eyes and clinging hands, as little like to meet again, or even to hear more of one another.

The whirlicote was not much better than an ornamental waggon, and Lady Salisbury, with the Mother of the Maids, did their best to lessen the force of the jolts as by six stout horses it was dragged over the chalk road over the downs, passing the wonderful stones of Amesbury—a wider circle than even Stonehenge, though without the triliths, *i.e.* the stones laid one over the tops of the other two like a doorway. Grisell heard something murmured about Merlin and Arthur and Guinevere, but she did not heed, and she was quite worn out with fatigue by the time they reached the descent into the long smooth valley where Wilton Abbey stood, and the spire of the Cathedral could be seen rising tall and beautiful.

The convent lay low, among meadows all

shut in with fine elm trees, and the cows belonging to the sisters were being driven home, their bells tinkling. There was an outer court, with an arched gate kept by a stout porter, and thus far came the whirlicote and the Countess's attendants; but a lay portress, in a cap and veil and black dress, came out to receive her as the door of the carriage was opened, and held out her arms to receive the muffled figure of the little visitor. 'Ah, poor maid,' she said, 'but Sister Avice will soon heal her.'

At the deeply ornamented round archway of the inner gate to the cloistered court stood the Lady Abbess, at the head of all her sisters, drawn up in double line to receive the Countess, whom they took to their refectory and to their chapel.

Of this, however, Grisell saw nothing, for she

had been taken into the arms of a tall nun in a black veil. At first she shuddered and would have screamed if she had been a little stronger and less tired, for illness and weakness had brought back the babyish horror of anything black; but she felt soothed by the sweet voice and tender words, 'Poor little one! she is fore-spent. She shall lie down on a soft bed, and have some sweet milk anon.'

Still a deadly feeling of faintness came upon her before she had been carried to the little bed which had been made ready for her. When she opened her eyes, while a spoon was held to her lips, the first thing she saw was the sweetest, calmest, most motherly of faces bent over her, one arm round her, the other giving her the spoon of some cordial. She looked up and

even smiled, though it was a sad contorted smile, which brought a tear into the good sister's eyes ; but then she fell asleep, and only half awoke when the Countess came up to see her for the last time, and bade her farewell with a kiss on her forehead, and a charge to Sister Avice to watch her well, and be tender with her. Indeed no one could look at Sister Avice's gentle face and think there was much need of the charge.

Sister Avice was one of the women who seem to be especially born for the gentlest tasks of womanhood. She might have been an excellent wife and mother, but from the very hour of her birth she had been vowed to be a nun in gratitude on her mother's part for her father's safety at Agincourt. She had been placed at Wilton

when almost a baby, and had never gone farther from it than on very rare occasions to the Cathedral at Salisbury; but she had grown up with a wonderful instinct for nursing and healing, and had a curious insight into the properties of herbs, as well as a soft deft hand and touch, so that for some years she had been sister infirmarer, and moreover the sick were often brought to the gates for her counsel, treatment, or, as some believed, even her healing touch.

When Grisell awoke she was alone in the long, large, low room, which was really built over the Norman cloister. The walls were of pale creamy stone, but at the end where she lay there were hangings of faded tapestry. At one end there was a window, through the thick glass of which could be dimly seen, as Grisell raised herself a

little, beautiful trees, and the splendid spire of the Cathedral rising, as she dreamily thought, like a finger pointing upwards. Nearer were several more narrow windows along the side of the room, and that beside her bed had the lattice open, so that she saw a sloping green bank, with a river at the foot; and there was a trim garden between. Opposite to her there seemed to be another window with a curtain drawn across it, through which came what perhaps had wakened her, a low, clear, murmuring tone, pausing and broken by the full, sweet, if rather shrill response in women's voices. Beneath that window was a little altar, with a crucifix and two candlesticks, a holy-water stoup by the side, and there was above the little deep window a carving of the Blessed Virgin with the Holy Child, on either side a niche, one with a

figure of a nun holding a taper, the other of a bishop with a book.

Grisell might have begun crying again at finding herself alone, but the sweet chanting lulled her, and she lay back on her pillows, half dozing but quite content, except that the wound on her neck felt stiff and dry ; and by and by when the chanting ceased, the kind nun, with a lay sister, came back again carrying water and other appliances, at sight of which Grisell shuddered, for Master Miles never touched her without putting her to pain.

‘*Benedicite*, my little maid, thou art awake,’ said Sister Avise. ‘I thought thou wouldst sleep till the vespers were ended. Now let us dress these sad wounds of thine, and thou shalt sleep again.’

Grisell submitted, as she knew she must, but to her surprise Sister Avice's touch was as soft and soothing as were her words, and the ointment she applied was fragrant and delicious and did not burn or hurt her.

She looked up gratefully, and murmured her thanks, and then the evening meal was brought in, and she sat up to partake of it on the seat of the window looking out on the Cathedral spire. It was a milk posset far more nicely flavoured than what she had been used to at Amesbury, where, in spite of the Countess's kindness, the master cook had grown tired of any special service for the Dacre wench; and unless Margaret of York secured fruit for her, she was apt to be regaled with only the scraps that Maudlin managed to cater for her after the meals were over.

After that, Sister Avice gently undressed her, took care that she said her prayers, and sat by her till she fell asleep, herself telling her that she should sleep beside her, and that she would hear the voices of the sisters singing in the chapel their matins and lauds. Grisell did hear them, as in a dream, but she had not slept so well since her disaster as she slept on that night.

CHAPTER V

SISTER AVICE

Love, to her ear, was but a name
Combined with vanity and shame ;
Her hopes, her fears, her joys, were all
Bounded within the cloister wall.

SCOTT, *Marmion*.

SISTER AVICE sat in the infirmary, diligently picking the leaves off a large mass of wood-sorrel which had been brought to her by the children around, to make therewith a conserve.

Grisell lay on her couch. She had been dressed, and had knelt at the window, where the curtain was drawn back while mass was said by the Chaplain, the nuns kneeling in their order and

making their responses. It was a low-browed chapel of Norman or even older days, with circular arches and heavy round piers, and so dark that the gleam of the candles was needed to light it.

Grisell watched, till tired with kneeling she went back to her couch, slept a little, and then wondered to see Sister Avice still compounding her simples.

She moved wearily, and sighed for Madge to come in and tell her all the news of Amesbury—who was riding at the ring, or who had shot the best bolt, or who had had her work picked out as not neat or well shaded enough.

Sister Avice came and shook up her pillow, and gave her a dried plum and a little milk, and began to talk to her.

‘You will soon be better,’ she said, ‘and then you will be able to play in the garden.’

‘Is there any playfellow for me?’ asked Grisell.

‘There is a little maid from Bemerton, who comes daily to learn her hornbook and her sampler. Mayhap she will stay and play with you.’

‘I had Madge at Amesbury; I shall love no one as well as Madge! See what she gave me.’

Grisell displayed her pouncet box, which was duly admired, and then she asked wearily whether she should always have to stay in the convent.

‘O no, not of need,’ said the sister. ‘Many a maiden who has been here for a time has gone out into the world, but some love this home the best, as I have done.’

‘Did yonder nun on the wall?’ asked Grisell.

‘Yea, truly. She was bred here, and never left it, though she was a King’s daughter. Edith was her name, and two days after Holy Cross day we shall keep her feast. Shall I tell you her story?’

‘Prithee, prithee!’ exclaimed Grisell. ‘I love a tale dearly.’

Sister Avice told the legend, how St. Edith grew in love and tenderness at Wilton, and how she loved the gliding river and the flowers in the garden, and how all loved her, her young playmates especially. She promised one who went away to be wedded that she would be godmother to her first little daughter, but ere the daughter was born the saintly Edith had died. The babe was carried to be christened in the font at Winchester Cathedral, and by a great and holy man, no other than Alphegius, who was then

Bishop of Winchester, but was made Archbishop of Canterbury, and died a holy martyr.

‘Then,’ said Sister Avice, ‘there was a great marvel, for among the sponsors around the square black font there stood another figure in the dress of our Mother Abbess, and as the Bishop spake and said, “Bear this taper, in token that thy lamp shall be alight when the Bridegroom cometh,” the form held the torch, shining bright, clear, and like no candle or light on earth ever shone, and the face was the face of the holy Edith. It is even said that she held the babe, but that I know not, being a spirit without a body, but she spake the name, her own name Edith. And when the holy rite was over, she had vanished away.’

‘And that is she, with the lamp in her hand? Oh, I should have been afraid!’ cried Grisell.

‘Not of the holy soul?’ said the sister.

‘Oh! I hope she will never come in here, by the little window into the church,’ cried Grisell trembling.

Indeed, for some time, in spite of all Sister Avice could say, Grisell could not at night be free from the fear of a visit from St. Edith, who, as she was told, slept her long sleep in the church below. It may be feared that one chief reliance was on the fact that she could not be holy enough for a vision of the Saint, but this was not so valuable to her as the touch of Sister Avice’s kind hand, or the very knowing her present.

That story was the prelude to many more. Grisell wanted to hear it over again, and then who was the Archbishop martyr, and who were the Virgins in memory of whom the lamps were

carried. Both these, and many another history, parable, or legend were told her by Sister Avice, training her soul, throughout the long recovery, which was still very slow, but was becoming more confirmed every day. Grisell could use her eye, turn her head, and the wounds closed healthily under the sister's treatment without showing symptoms of breaking out afresh ; and she grew in strength likewise, first taking a walk in the trim garden and orchard, and by and by being pronounced able to join the other girl scholars of the convent. Only here was the first demur. Her looks did not recover with her health. She remained with a much-seamed neck, and a terrible scar across each cheek, on one side purple, and her eyebrows were entirely gone.

She seemed to have forgotten the matter while

she was entirely in the infirmary, with no companion but Sister Avice, and occasionally a lay sister, who came to help; but the first time she went down the turret stair into the cloister—a beautiful succession of arches round a green court—she met a novice and a girl about her own age; the elder gave a little scream at the sight and ran away.

The other hung back. ‘Mary, come hither,’ said Sister Avice. ‘This is Grisell Dacre, who hath suffered so much. Wilt thou not come and kiss and welcome her?’

Mary came forward rather reluctantly, but Grisell drew up her head with, ‘Oh, if you had liefer not!’ and turned her back on the girl.

Sister Avice followed as Grisell walked away as fast as her weakness allowed, and found her

sitting breathless at the third step on the stairs.

‘Oh, no—go away—don’t bring her. Every one will hate me,’ sobbed the poor child.

Avice could only gather her into her arms, though embraces were against the strict rule of Benedictine nuns, and soothe and coax her to believe that by one at least she was not hated.

‘I had forgotten,’ said Grisell. ‘I saw myself once at Amesbury! but my face was not well then. Let me see again, sister! Where’s a mirror?’

‘Ah! my child, we nuns are not allowed the use of worldly things like mirrors; I never saw one in my life.’

‘But oh, for pity’s sake, tell me what like am I. Am I so loathly?’

‘Nay, my dear maid, I love thee too well to think of aught save that thou art mine own little one, given back to us by the will of Heaven. Ay, and so will others think of thee, if thou art good and loving to them.’

‘Nay, nay, none will ever love me! All will hate and flee from me, as from a basilisk or cockatrice, or the Loathly Worm of Spindlesheugh,’ sobbed Grisell.

‘Then, my maid, thou must win them back by thy sweet words and kind deeds. They are better than looks. And here too they shall soon think only of what thou art, not of what thou look’st.’

‘But know you, sister, how—how I should have been married to Leonard Copeland, the very youth that did me this despite, and he is fair and beauteous as a very angel, and I did love him so,

and now he and his father rid away from Amesbury, and left me because I am so foul to see,' cried Grisell, between her sobs.

'If they could treat thee thus despiteously, he would surely not have made thee a good husband,' reasoned the sister.

'But I shall never have a husband now,' wailed Grisell.

'Belike not,' said Sister Avice; 'but, my sweetheart, there is better peace and rest and cheer in such a home as this holy house, than in the toils and labours of the world. When my sisters at Dunbridge and Dinton come to see me they look old and careworn, and are full of tales of the turmoil and trouble of husbands, and sons, and dues, and tenants' fees, and villeins, and I know not what, that I often think that even in this

world's sense I am the best off. And far above and beyond that,' she added, in a low voice, 'the virgin hath a hope, a Spouse beyond all human thought.'

Grisell did not understand the thought, and still wept bitterly. 'Must she be a nun all her life?' was all she thought of, and the shady cloister seemed to her like a sort of prison. Sister Avice had to soothe and comfort her, till her tears were all spent, as so often before, and she had cried herself so ill that she had to be taken back to her bed and lie down again. It was some days before she could be coaxed out again to encounter any companions.

However, as time went on health, and with it spirits and life, came back to Grisell Dacre at Wilton, and she became accustomed to

being with the other inmates of the fine old convent, as they grew too much used to her appearance to be startled or even to think about it. The absence of mirrors prevented it from ever being brought before her, and Sister Avice set herself to teach her how goodness, sweetness, and kindness could endear any countenance, and indeed Grisell saw for herself how much more loved was the old and very plain Mother Anne than the very beautiful young Sister Isabel, who had been forced into the convent by her tyrannical brother, and wore out her life in fretting and rudeness to all who came in her way. She declared that the sight of Grisell made her ill, and insisted that the veiled hood which all the girls wore should be pulled forward whenever they came near one another,

and that Grisell's place should be out of her sight in chapel or refectory.

Every one else, however, was very kind to the poor girl, Sister Avice especially so, and Grisell soon forgot her disfigurement when she ceased to suffer from it. She had begun to learn reading, writing, and a little Latin, besides spinning, stitchery, and a few housewifely arts, in the Countess of Salisbury's household, for every lady was supposed to be educated in these arts, and great establishments were schools for the damsels there bred up. It was the same with convent life, and each nunnery had traditional works of its own, either in embroidery, cookery, or medicine. Some secrets there were not imparted beyond the professed nuns, and only to the more trustworthy of them, so that each sisterhood might have its

own especial glory in confections, whether in portrait-worked vestments, in illuminations, in sweetmeats, or in salves and unguents; but the pensioners were instructed in all those common arts of bakery, needlework, notability, and surgery which made the lady of a castle or manor so important; and within the last century in the more fashionable abbeys Latin of a sort, French 'of the school of Stratford le Bowe,' and the like, were added. Thus Grisell learnt as an apt scholar these arts, and took especial delight in helping Sister Avice to compound her simples, and acquired a tender hand with which to apply them.

Moreover, she learnt not only to say and sing her Breviary, but to know the signification in English. There were translations of the Lord's Prayer and Creed in the hands of all careful

and thoughtful people, even among the poor, if they had a good parish priest, or had come under the influence of the better sort of friars. In convents where discipline was kept up the meaning was carefully taught, and there were English primers in the hands of all the devout, so that the services could be intelligently followed even by those who did not learn Latin, as did Grisell. Selections from Scripture history, generally clothed in rhyme, and versified lives of the Saints, were read aloud at meal-times in the refectory, and Grisell became so good a reader that she was often chosen to chant out the sacred story, and her sweet northern voice was much valued in the singing in the church. She was quite at home there, and though too young to be admitted as a novice, she wore a black dress and white hood

like theirs, and the annual gifts to the nunnery from the Countess of Salisbury were held to entitle her to the residence there as a pensioner. She had fully accepted the idea of spending her life there, sheltered from the world, among the kind women whom she loved, and who had learnt to love her, and in devotion to God, and works of mercy to the sick.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROCTOR

But if a mannes soul were in his purse,
For in his purse he should yfurnished be.
CHAUCER, *Canterbury Pilgrims*.

FIVE years had passed since Grisell had been received at Wilton, when the Abbess died. She had been infirm and confined to her lodging for many months, and Grisell had hardly seen her, but her death was to change the whole tenor of the maiden's life.

The funeral ceremonies took place in full state. The Bishop himself came to attend them, and likewise all the neighbouring clergy, and the

monks, friars, and nuns, overflowing the chapel, while peasants and beggars, for whom there was no room in the courts, encamped outside the walls, to receive the dole and pray for the soul of the right reverend Mother Abbess.

For nine days constant services were kept up, and the requiem mass was daily said, the dirges daily sung, and the alms bestowed on the crowd, who were by no means specially sorrowful or devout, but beguiled the time by watching *jongleurs* and mountebanks performing beyond the walls.

There was the 'Month's Mind' still to come, and then the chapter of nuns intended to proceed to the election of their new Abbess, unanimously agreeing that she should be their present Prioress, who had held kindly rule over them through the slow to-decay of the late Abbess. Before, however,

this could be done a messenger arrived on a mule bearing an inhibition to the sisters to proceed in the election.

His Holiness Pope Calixtus had reserved to himself the next appointment to this as well as to certain other wealthy abbeys.

The nuns in much distress appealed to the Bishop, but he could do nothing for them. Such reservations had been constant in the subservient days that followed King John's homage, and though the great Edwards had struggled against them, and the yoke had been shaken off during the Great Schism, no sooner had this been healed than the former claims were revived, nay, redoubled, and the pious Henry VI. was not the man to resist them. The sisters therefore waited in suspense, daring only meekly to recommend their Prioress

in a humble letter, written by the Chaplain, and backed by a recommendation from Bishop Beauchamp. Both alike were disregarded, as all had expected.

The new Abbess thus appointed was the Madre Matilda de Borgia, a relation of Pope Calixtus, very noble, and of Spanish birth, as the Commissioner assured the nuns ; but they had never heard of her before, and were not at all gratified. They had always elected their Abbess before, and had quite made up their minds as to the choice of the present Mother Prioress as Abbess, and of Sister Avice as Prioress.

However, they had only to submit. To appeal to the King or to their Bishop would have been quite useless ; they could only do as the Pope commanded, and elect the Mother Matilda, con-

soling themselves with the reflection that she was not likely to trouble herself about them, and their old Prioress would govern them. And so she did so far as regarded the discipline of the house, but what they had not so entirely understood was the Mother de Borgia's desire to squeeze all she could out of the revenues of the house.

Her Proctor arrived, a little pinched man in a black gown and square cap, and desired to see the Mother Prioress and her steward, and to overlook the income and expenditure of the convent; to know who had duly paid her dowry to the nunnery, what were the rents, and the like. The sisters had already raised a considerable gift in silver merks to be sent through Lombard merchants to their new Abbess, and this requisition was a fresh blow.

Presently the Proctor marked out Grisell Dacre, and asked on what terms she was at the convent. It was explained that she had been brought thither for her cure by the Lady of Salisbury, and had stayed on, without fee or payment from her own home in the north; but the ample donations of the Earl of Salisbury had been held as full compensation, and it had been contemplated to send to the maiden's family to obtain permission to enrol her as a sister after her novitiate—which might soon begin, as she was fifteen years old.

The Proctor, however, was much displeased. The nuns had no right to receive a pensioner without payment, far less to admit a novice as a sister without a dowry.

Mistress Grisell must be returned instantly upon the hands either of her own family or of

the Countess of Salisbury, and certainly not readmitted unless her dowry were paid. He scarcely consented to give time for communication with the Countess, to consider how to dispose of the poor child.

The Prioress sent messengers to Amesbury and to Christ Church, but the Earl and Countess were not there, nor was it clear where they were likely to be. Whitburn was too far off to send to in the time allowed by the Proctor, and Grisell had heard nothing from her home all the time she had been at Wilton. The only thing that the Prioress could devise, was to request the Chaplain to seek her out at Salisbury a trustworthy escort, pilgrim, merchant or other, with whom Grisell might safely travel to London; and if the Earl and Countess were not there, some responsible person of theirs, or of their

son's, was sure to be found, who would send the maiden on.

The Chaplain mounted his mule and rode over to Salisbury, whence he returned, bringing with him news of a merchant's wife who was about to go on pilgrimage to fulfil a vow at Walsingham, and would feel herself honoured by acting as the convoy of the Lady Grisell Dacre as far at least as London.

There was no further hope of delay or failure. Poor Grisell must be cast out on the world—the Proctor even spoke of calling the Countess, or her steward, to account for her maintenance during these five years.

There was weeping and wailing in the cloisters at the parting, and Grisell clung to Sister Avice, mourning for her peaceful, holy life.

‘Nay, my child, none can take from thee a holy life.’

‘If I make a vow of virginity none can hinder me.’

‘That was not what I meant. No maid has a right to take such a vow on herself without consent of her father, nor is it binding otherwise. No! but no one can take away from a Christian maid the power of holiness. Bear that for ever in mind, sweetheart. Naught that can be done by man or by devil to the body can hurt the soul that is fixed on Christ and does not consent to evil.’

‘The Saints forefend that ever—ever I should consent to evil.’

‘It is the Blessed Spirit alone who can guard thy will, my child. Will and soul not consenting nor being led astray, thou art safe. Nay, the lack of a fair-favoured face may be thy guard.’

‘All will hate me. Alack! alack!’

‘Not so. See, thou hast won love amongst us. Wherefore shouldst not thou in like manner win love among thine own people?’

‘My mother hates me already, and my father heeds me not.’

‘Love them, child! Do them good offices! None can hinder thee from that.’

‘Can I love those who love not me?’

‘Yea, little one. To serve and tend another brings the heart to love. Even as thou see’st a poor dog love the master who beats him, so it is with us, only with the higher Christian love. Service and prayer open the heart to love, hoping for nothing again, and full oft that which was not hoped for is vouchsafed.’

That was the comfort with which Grisell had

to start from her home of peace, conducted by the Chaplain, and even the Prioress, who would herself give her into the hands of the good Mistress Hall.

Very early they heard mass in the convent, and then rode along the bank of the river, with the downs sloping down on the other side, and the grand spire ever seeming as it were taller as they came nearer ; while the sound of the bells grew upon them, for there was then a second tower beyond to hold the bells, whose reverberation would have been dangerous to the spire, and most sweet was their chime, the sound of which had indeed often reached Wilton in favourable winds ; but it sounded like a sad farewell to Grisell.

The Prioress thought she ought to begin her journey by kneeling in the Cathedral, so they

crossed the shaded close and entered by the west door, with the long vista of clustered columns and pointed arches before them.

Low sounds of mass being said at different altars met their ears, for it was still early in the day. The Prioress passed the length of nave, and went beyond the choir to the lady chapel, with its slender supporting columns and exquisite arches, and there she, with Grisell by her side, joined in earnest supplications for the child.

The Chaplain touched her as she rose, and made her aware that the dame arrayed in a scarlet mantle and hood and dark riding-dress was Mistress Hall.

Silence was not observed in cathedrals or churches, especially in the naves, except when any sacred rite was going on, and no sooner was

the mass finished and '*Ite missa est*' pronounced than the scarlet cloak rose, and hastened into the south transept, where she waited for the Chaplain, Prioress, and Grisell. No introduction seemed needed. 'The Holy Mother Prioress,' she began, bending her knee and kissing the lady's hand. 'Much honoured am I by the charge of this noble little lady.' Grisell by the by was far taller than the plump little goodwoman Hall, but that was no matter, and the Prioress had barely space to get in a word of thanks before she went on : 'I will keep her and tend her as the apple of mine eye. She shall pray with me at all the holy shrines for the good of her soul and mine. She shall be my bedfellow wherever we halt, and sit next me, and be cherished as though she were mine own daughter—ladybird as she is—till I can give her into

the hands of the good Lady Countess. O yes—you may trust Joan Hall, dame reverend mother. She is no new traveller. I have been in my time to all our shrines—to St. Thomas of Canterbury, to St. Winifred's Well; ay, and, moreover, to St. James of Compostella, and St. Martha of Provence, not to speak of lesser chantries and Saints. Ay, and I crossed the sea to see the holy coat of Trèves, and St. Ursula's eleven thousand skulls—and a gruesome sight they were. Nay, if the Lady Countess be not in London it would cost me little to go on to the north with her. There's St. Andrew of Ely; Hugh, great St. Hugh and little St. Hugh, both of them at Lincoln; and there's St. Wilfred of York, and St. John of Beverley, not to speak of St. Cuthbert of Durham and of St. Hilda of Whitby, who might take it ill if I pray

at none of their altars, when I have been to so many of their brethren. Oh, you may trust me, reverend mother; I'll never have the young lady, bless her sweet face, out of my sight till I have safe bestowed her with my Lady Countess, our good customer for all manner of hardware, or else with her own kin.'

The good woman's stream of conversation lasted almost without drawing breath all the way down the nave. It was a most good-humoured hearty voice, and her plump figure and rosy face beamed with good nature, while her bright black eyes had a lively glance.

The Chaplain had inquired about her, and found that she was one of the good women to whom pilgrimage was an annual dissipation, consecrated and meritorious as they fondly believed,

and gratifying their desire for change and variety. She was a kindly person of good reputation, trustworthy, and kind to the poor; and stout John Hall, her husband, could manage the business alone, and was thought not to regret a little reprieve from her continual tongue.

She wanted the Prioress to do her the honour of breaking her fast with her, but the good nun was in haste to return, after having once seen her charge in safe hands, and excused herself; while Grisell, blessed by the Chaplain, and hiding her tears under her veil, was led away to the substantial smith's abode, where she was to take a first meal before starting on her journey on the strong forest pony which the Chaplain's care had provided for her.

CHAPTER VII

THE PILGRIM OF SALISBURY

She hadde passed many a strange shrine,
At Rome she had been and at Boleine,
At Galice, at St. James, and at Coleine,
She could moche of wandering by the way.

CHAUCER, *Canterbury Pilgrims*.

GRISELL found herself brought into a hall where a stout oak table occupied the centre, covered with home-spun napery, on which stood trenchers, wooden bowls, pewter and a few silver cups, and several large pitchers of ale, small beer, or milk. A pie and a large piece of bacon, also a loaf of barley bread and a smaller wheaten one, were there.

Shelves all round the walls shone with pewter and copper dishes, cups, kettles, and vessels and implements of all household varieties, and ranged round the floor lay ploughshares, axes, and mattocks, all polished up. The ring of hammers on the anvil was heard in the court in the rear. The front of the hall was open for the most part, without windows, but it could be closed at night.

Breakfast was never a regular meal, and the household had partaken of it, so that there was no one in the hall excepting Master Hall, a stout, brawny, grizzled man, with a good-humoured face, and his son, more slim, but growing into his likeness, also a young notable-looking daughter-in-law with a swaddled baby tucked under her arm.

They seated Grisell at the table, and implored her to eat. The wheaten bread and the fowl were, it seemed, provided in her honour, and she could not but take her little knife from the sheath in her girdle, turn back her nun-like veil, and prepare to try to drive back her sobs, and swallow the milk of almonds pressed on her.

‘Eh!’ cried the daughter-in-law in amaze.
‘She’s only scarred after all.’

‘Well, what else should she be, bless her poor heart?’ said Mrs. Hall the elder.

‘Why, wasn’t it thou thyself, good mother, that brought home word that they had the pig-faced lady at Wilton there?’

‘Bless thee, Agnes, thou shouldst know better than to lend an ear to all the idle tales thy poor old mother may hear at market or fair.’

‘Then should we have enough to do,’ muttered her husband.

‘And as thou see’st, ’tis a sweet little face, only cruelly marred by the evil hap.’

Poor Grisell was crimson at finding all eyes on her, an ordeal she had never undergone in the convent, and she hastily pulled forward her veil.

‘Nay now, my sweet young lady, take not the idle words in ill part,’ pleaded the good hostess. ‘We all know how to love thee, and what is a smooth skin to a true heart? Take a bit more of the pasty, ladybird; we’ll have far to ride ere we get to Wherwell, where the good sisters will give us a meal for young St. Edward’s sake and thy Prioress’s. Ay—I turn out of my way for that; I never yet paid my devotion to poor young King Edward, and he might take

it in dudgeon, being a king, and his shrine so near at hand.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed the smith; 'trust my dame for being on the right side of the account with the Saints. Well for me and Jack that we have little Agnes here to mind the things on earth meanwhile. Nay, nay, dame, I say nought to hinder thee; I know too well what it means when spring comes, and thou beginn'st to moan and tell up the tale of the shrines where thou hast not told thy beads.'

It was all in good humour, and Master Hall walked out to the city gate to speed his gad-about or pious wife, whichever he might call her on her way, apparently quite content to let her go on her pilgrimages for the summer quarter.

She rode a stout mule, and was attended by

two sturdy varlets—quite sufficient guards for pilgrims, who were not supposed to carry any valuables. Grisell sadly rode her pony, keeping her veil well over her face, yearning over the last view of the beloved spire, thinking of Sister Avice ministering to her poor, and with a very definite fear of her own reception in the world and dread of her welcome at home. Yet there was a joy in being on horseback once more, for her who had ridden moorland ponies as soon as she could walk.

Goodwife Hall talked on, with anecdotes of every hamlet that they passed, and these were not very many. At each church they dismounted and said their prayers, and if there were a hostel near, they let their animals feed the while, and obtained some refreshment

themselves. England was not a very safe place for travellers just then, but the cockle-shells sewn to the pilgrim's hat of the dame, and to that of one of her attendants, and the tall staff and wallet each carried, were passports of security. Nothing could be kinder than Mistress Hall was to her charge, of whom she was really proud, and when they halted for the night at the nunnery of Queen Elfrida at Wherwell, she took care to explain that this was no burgess's daughter, but the Lady Grisell Dacre of Whitburn, trusted to *her* convoy, and thus obtained for her quarters in the guest-chamber of the refectory instead of in the general hospitium; but on the whole Grisell had rather not have been exposed to the shock of being shown to strangers, even kindly ones, for even if they

did not exclaim, some one was sure to start and whisper.

After another halt for the night the travellers reached London, and learned at the city gate that the Earl and Countess of Salisbury were absent, but that their eldest son, the Earl of Warwick, was keeping court at Warwick House.

Thither therefore Mistress Hall resolved to conduct Grisell. The way lay through narrow streets with houses overhanging the roadway, but the house itself was like a separate castle, walled round, enclosing a huge space, and with a great arched porter's lodge, where various men-at-arms lounged, all adorned on the arm of their red jackets with the bear and ragged staff.

They were courteous, however, for the Earl Richard of Warwick insisted on civility to all

comers, and they respected the scallop-shell on the dame's hat. They greeted her good-humouredly. 'Ha, good-day, good pilgrim wife. Art bound for St. Paul's? Here's supper to the fore for all comers!'

'Thanks, sir porter, but this maid is of other mould; she is the Lady Grisell Dacre, and is company for my lord and my lady.'

'Nay, her hood and veil look like company for the Abbess. Come this way, dame, and we will find the steward to marshal her.'

Grisell had rather have been left to the guardianship of her kind old friend, but she was obliged to follow. They dismounted in a fine court with cloister-like buildings round it, and full of people of all kinds, for no less than six hundred stout yeomen wore red coats and the

bear and ragged staff. Grisell would fain have clung to her guide, but she was not allowed to do so. She was marshalled up stone steps into a great hall, where tables were being laid, covered with white napery and glittering with silver and pewter.

The seneschal marched before her all the length of the hall to where there was a large fireplace with a burning log, summer though it was, and shut off by handsome tapestried and carved screens sat a half circle of ladies, with a young-looking lady in a velvet fur-trimmed surcoat in their midst. A tall man with a keen, resolute face, in long robes and gold belt and chain, stood by her leaning on her chair.

The seneschal announced, 'Place, place for the Lady Grisell Dacre of Whitburn,' and Grisell bent

low, putting back as much of her veil as she felt courtesy absolutely to require. The lady rose, the knight held out his hand to raise the bending figure. He had that power of recollection and recognition which is so great an element in popularity. 'The Lady Grisell Dacre,' he said. 'She who met with so sad a disaster when she was one of my lady mother's household?'

Grisell, glowing all over, signed acquiescence, and he went on, 'Welcome to my poor house, lady. Let me present you to my wife.'

The Countess of Warwick was a pale, somewhat inane lady. She was the heiress of the Beauchamps and De Spensers in consequence of the recent death of her brother, 'the King of the Isle of Wight'—and through her inheritance her husband had risen to his great power. She was

delicate and feeble, almost apathetic, and she followed her husband's lead, and received her guest with fair courtesy ; and Grisell ventured in a trembling voice to explain that she had spent those years at Wilton, but that the new Abbess's Proctor would not consent to her remaining there any longer, not even long enough to send to her parents or to the Countess of Salisbury.

‘Poor maiden ! Such are the ways of his Holiness where the King is not man enough to stand in his way,’ said Warwick. ‘So, fair maiden, if you will honour my house for a few days, as my lady's guest, I will send you north in more fitting guise than with this white-smith dame.’

‘She hath been very good to me,’ Grisell ventured to add to her thanks.

‘She shall have good entertainment here,’ said

the Earl smiling. 'No doubt she hath already, as Sarum born. See that Goodwife Hall, the white-smith's wife and her following have the best of harbouring,' he added to his silver-chained steward.

'You are a Dacre of Whitburn,' he added to Grisell. 'Your father has not taken sides with Dacre of Gilsland and the Percies.' Then seeing that Grisell knew nothing of all this, he laughed and said, 'Little convent birds, you know nought of our worldly strifes.'

In fact, Grisell had heard nothing from her home for the last five years, which was the less marvel as neither her father nor her mother could write if they had cared to do so. Nor did the convent know much of the state of England, though prayers had been constantly said for the

King's recovery, and of late there had been thanksgivings for the birth of the Prince of Wales; but it was as much as she did know that just now the Duke of York was governing, for the poor King seemed as senseless as a stone, and the Earl of Salisbury was his Chancellor. Nevertheless Salisbury was absent in the north, and there was a quarrel going on between the Nevils and the Percies which Warwick was going to compose, and thus would be able to take Grisell so far in his company.

The great household was larger than even what she remembered at the houses of the Countess of Salisbury before her accident, and, fresh from the stillness of the convent as she was, the noises were amazing to her when all sat down to supper. Tables were laid all along the vast hall. She was

placed at the upper one to her relief, beside an old lady, Dame Gresford, whom she remembered to have seen at Montacute Castle in her childhood, as one of the attendants on the Countess. She was forced to put back her veil, and she saw some of the young knights and squires staring at her, then nudging one another and laughing.

‘Never mind them, sweetheart,’ said Dame Gresford kindly ; ‘they are but unmannerly lurdanes, and the Lord Earl would make them know what is befitting if his eye fell on them.’

The good lady must have had a hint from the authorities, for she kept Grisell under her wing in the huge household, which was like a city in itself. There was a knight who acted as steward, with innumerable knights, squires, and pages under him, besides the six hundred red-jacketed

yeomen, and servants of all degrees, in the immense court of the buttery and kitchen, as indeed there had need to be, for six oxen were daily cooked, with sheep and other meats in proportion, and any friend or acquaintance of any one in this huge establishment might come in, and not only eat and drink his fill, but carry off as much meat as he could on the point of his dagger.

Goodwife Hall, as coming from Salisbury, stayed there in free quarters, while she made the round of all the shrines in London, and she was intensely gratified by the great Earl recollecting, or appearing to recollect, her and inquiring after her husband, that hearty burgess, whose pewter was so lasting, and he was sure was still in use among his black guard.

When she saw Grisell on finally departing for St. Albans, she was carrying her head a good deal higher on the strength of 'my Lord Earl's grace to her.' She hoped that her sweet Lady Grisell would remain here, as the best hap she could have in the most noble, excellent, and open-handed house in the world! Grisell's own wishes were not the same, for the great household was very bewildering—a strange change from her quietly-busy convent. The Countess was quiet enough, but dull and sickly, and chiefly occupied by her ailments. She seemed to be always thinking about leeches, wise friars, wonderful nuns, or even wizards and cunning women, and was much concerned that her husband absolutely forbade her consulting the witch of Spitalfields.

'Nay, dame,' said he, 'an thou didst, the next

thing we should hear would be that thou hadst been sticking pins into King Harry's waxen image and roasting him before the fire, and that nothing but roasting thee in life and limb within a fire would bring him to life and reason.'

'They would never dare,' cried the lady.

'Who can tell what the Queen would dare if she gets her will!' demanded the Earl. 'Wouldst like to do penance with sheet and candle, like Gloucester's wife?'

Such a possibility was enough to silence the Lady of Warwick on the score of witches, and the only time she spoke to Grisell was to ask her about Sister Avice and her cures. She set herself to persuade her husband to let her go down to one of his mother's Wiltshire houses to consult the nun, but Warwick had business in the north,

nor would he allow her to be separated from him, lest she might be detained as a hostage.

Dame Gresford continued to be Grisell's protector, and let the girl sit and spin or embroider beside her, while the other ladies of the house played at ball in the court, or watched the exercises of the pages and squires. The dame's presence and authority prevented Grisell's being beset with uncivil remarks, but she knew she was like a toad among the butterflies, as she overheard some saucy youth calling her, while a laugh answered him, and she longed for her convent.

CHAPTER VIII

OLD PLAYFELLOWS

Alone thou goest forth,
Thy face unto the north,
Moor and pleasance all around thee and beneath thee.

E. BARRETT BROWNING, *A Valediction*.

ONE great pleasure fell to Grisell's share, but only too brief. The family of the Duke of York on their way to Baynard's Castle halted at Warwick House, and the Duchess Cecily, tall, fair, and stately, sailed into the hall, followed by three fair daughters, while Warwick, her nephew, though nearly of the same age, advanced with his wife to meet and receive her.

In the midst of the exchange of affectionate but formal greetings a cry of joy was heard, 'My Grisell! yes, it is my Grisell!' and springing from the midst of her mother's suite, Margaret Plantagenet, a tall, lovely, dark-haired girl, threw her arms round the thin slight maiden with the scarred face, which excited the scorn and surprise of her two sisters.

'Margaret! What means this?' demanded the Duchess severely.

'It is my Grisell Dacre, fair mother, my dear companion at my aunt of Salisbury's manor,' said Margaret, trying to lead forward her shrinking friend. 'She who was so cruelly scathed.'

Grisell curtsied low, but still hung back, and Lord Warwick briefly explained. 'Daughter to Will Dacre of Whitburn, a staunch baron of the

north. My mother bestowed her at Wilton, whence the creature of the Pope's intruding Abbess has taken upon him to expel her. So I am about to take her to Middleham, where my mother may see to her further bestowal.'

'We have even now come from Middleham,' said the Duchess. 'My Lord Duke sent for me, but he looks to you, my lord, to compose the strife between your father and the insolent Percies.'

The Duke was at Windsor with the poor insane King, and the Earl and the Duchess plunged into a discussion of the latest news of the northern counties and of the Court. The elder daughters were languidly entertained by the Countess, but no one disturbed the interview of Margaret and Grisell, who, hand in hand, had

withdrawn into the embrasure of a window, and there fondled each other, and exchanged tidings of their young lives, and Margaret told of friends in the Nevil household.

All too soon the interview came to an end. The Duchess, after partaking of a manchet, was ready to proceed to Baynard's Castle, and the Lady Margaret was called for. Again, in spite of surprised, not to say displeased looks, she embraced her dear old playfellow. 'Don't go into a convent, Grisell,' she entreated. 'When I am wedded to some great earl, you must come and be my lady, mine own, own dear friend. Promise me! Your pledge, Grisell.'

There was no time for the pledge. Margaret was peremptorily summoned. They would not meet again. The Duchess's intelligence had

quicken'd Warwick's departure, and the next day the first start northwards was to be made.

It was a mighty cavalcade. The black guard, namely, the kitchen ménage, with all their pots and pans, kettles and spits, were sent on a day's march beforehand, then came the yeomen, the knights and squires, followed by the more immediate attendants of the Earl and Countess and their court. She travelled in a whirlycote, and there were others provided for her elder ladies, the rest riding singly or on pillions, according to age or taste. Grisell did not like to part with her pony, and Dame Gresford preferred a pillion to the bumps and jolts of the waggon-like conveyances called chariots, so Grisell rode by her side, the fresh spring breezes bringing back the sense of being really a northern maid, and she threw

back her veil whenever she was alone with the attendants, who were used to her, though she drew it closely round when she encountered town or village. There were resting-places on the way. In great monasteries all were accommodated, being used to close quarters; in castles there was room for the 'Gentles,' who, if they fared well, heeded little how they slept, and their attendants found lairs in the kitchens or stables. In towns there was generally harbour for the noble portion; indeed in some, Warwick had dwellings of his own, or his father's, but these, at first, were at long distances apart, such as would be ridden by horsemen alone, not encumbered with ladies, and there were intermediate stages, where some of the party had to be dispersed in hostels.

It was in one of these, at Dunstable, that Dame Gresford had taken Grisell, and there were also sundry of the gentlemen of the escort. A minstrel was ensconced under the wide spread of the chimney, and began to sound his harp and sing long ballads in recitative to the company. Whether he did it in all innocence and ignorance, or one of the young squires had mischievously prompted him, there was no knowing; Dame Gresford suspected the latter, when he began the ballad of 'Sir Gawaine's Wedding.' She would have silenced it, but feared to draw more attention on her charge, who had never heard the song, and did not know what was coming, but listened with increasing eagerness as she heard of King Arthur, and of the giant, and the secret that the King could not guess, till as he rode—

He came to the green forest,
Underneath a green hollen tree,
There sat that lady in red scarlet
That unseenly was to see.

Some eyes were discourteously turned on the maiden, but she hardly saw them, and at any rate her nose was not crooked, nor had her eyes and mouth changed places, as in the case of the 'Loathly Lady.' She heard of the condition on which the lady revealed the secret, and how King Arthur bound himself to bring a fair young knight to wed the hideous being. Then when he revealed to his assembled knights—

Then some took up their hawks,
And some took up their hounds,
And some sware they would not marry her
For cities nor for towns.

Glances again went towards the scarred visage, but Grisell was heedless of them, only listening

how Sir Gawaine, Arthur's nephew, felt that his uncle's oath must be kept, and offered himself as the bridegroom.

Then after the marriage, when he looked on the lady, instead of the loathly hag he beheld a fair damsel! And he was told by her that he might choose whether she should be foul at night and fair by day, or fair each evening and frightful in the daylight hours. His choice at first was that her beauty should be for him alone, in his home, but when she objected that this would be hard on her, since she could thus never show her face when other dames ride with their lords—

Then buke him gentle Gawayne,
Said, 'Lady, that's but a shill;
Because thou art mine own lady
Thou shalt have all thy will.'

And his courtesy broke the spell of the step-dame, as the lady related—

‘She witched me, being a fair young lady,
To the green forest to dwell,
And there must I walk in woman’s likeness,
Most like a fiend in hell.’

Thenceforth the enchantment was broken,
and Sir Gawaine’s bride was fair to see.

Grisell had listened intently, absorbed in the narrative, so losing personal thought and feeling that it was startling to her to perceive that Dame Gresford was trying to hush a rude laugh, and one of the young squires was saying, ‘Hush, hush! for very shame.’

Then she saw that they were applying the story to her, and the blood rushed into her face, but the more courteous youth was trying to turn away attention by calling on the harper

for 'The Beggar of Bethnal Green,' or 'Lord Thomas and Fair Annet,' or any merry ballad. So it was borne in on Grisell that to these young gentlemen she was the lady unseemly to see. Yet though a few hot tears flowed, indignant and sorrowful, the sanguine spirit of youth revived. 'Sister Avice had told her how to be not loathly in the sight of those whom she could teach to love her.'

There was one bound by a pledge! Ah, he would never fulfil it. If he should, Grisell felt a resolute purpose within her that though she could not be transformed, he should not see her loathly in his sight, and in that hope she slept.

CHAPTER IX

THE KING-MAKER

O, where is faith ? O, where is loyalty ?

SHAKESPEARE, *Henry VI.*, Part II.

GRISELL was disappointed in her hopes of seeing her Countess of Salisbury again, for as she rode into the Castle of York she heard the Earl's hearty voice of greeting. 'Ha, stout Will of Whitburn, well met ! What, from the north ?'

The Earl stood talking with a tall brawny man, lean and strong, brown and weather-beaten, in a frayed suit of buff leather stained to all sorts of colours, in which rust predominated,

and a face all brown and red except for the grizzled eyebrows, hair, and stubbly beard. She had not seen her father since she was five years old, and she would not have known him.

‘I am from the south now, my lord,’ she heard his gruff voice say. ‘I have been taking my lad to be bred up in the Duke of York’s house, for better nurture than can be had in my sea-side tower.’

‘Quite right. Well done in you,’ responded Warwick. ‘The Duke of York is the man to hold by. We have an exchange for you, a daughter for a son,’ and he was leading the way towards Grisell, who had just dismounted from her pony, and stood by it, trembling a little, and bending for her father’s blessing.

It was not more than a crossing of her, and he was talking all the time.

‘Ha! how now! Methought my Lady of Salisbury had bestowed her in the Abbey—how call you it?’

‘Ay,’ returned Warwick; ‘but since we have not had King or Parliament with spirit to stand up to the Pope, he thrusts his claw in everywhere, puts a strange Abbess into Wilton, and what must she do but send down her Proctor to treat the poor nunnery as it were a sponge, and spite of all my Lady Mother’s bounties to the place, what lists he do but turn out the poor maid for lack of a dowry, not so much as giving time for a notice to be sent.’

‘If we had such a rogue in the North Country we should know how to serve him,’ observed

Sir William, and Warwick laughed as befitted a Westmoreland Nevil, albeit he was used to more civilised ways.

‘Scurvy usage,’ he said, ‘but the Prioress had no choice save to put her in such keeping as she could, and send her away to my Lady Mother, or failing her to her home.’

‘Soh! She must e’en jog off with me, though how it is to be with her my lady may tell, not I, since every groat, those villain yeomen and fisher folk would raise, went to fit out young Rob, and there has not been so much as a Border raid these four years and more. There are the nuns at Gateshead, as hard as nails, will not hear of a maid without a dower, and yonder mansworn fellow Copeland casts her off like an old glove! Let us look at you, wench! Ha! Face is unsightly

enough, but thou wilt not be a badly-made woman. Take heart, what's thy name—Grisell? May be there's luck for thee still, though it be hard of coming to Whitburn,' he added, turning to Warwick. 'There's this wench scorched to a cinder, enough to fright one, and my other lad racked from head to foot with pain and sores, so as it is a misery to hear the poor child cry out, and even if he be reared, he will be good for nought save a convent.'

Grisell would fain have heard more about this poor little brother, but the ladies were entering the castle, and she had to follow them. She saw no more of her father except from the far end of the table, but orders were issued that she should be ready to accompany him on his homeward way the next morning at six o'clock. Her brother

Robert had been sent in charge of some of the Duke of York's retainers, to join his household as a page, though they had missed him on the route, and the Lord of Whitburn was anxious to get home again, never being quite sure what the Scots, or the Percies, or his kinsmen of Gilsland, might attempt in his absence. 'Though,' as he said, 'my lady was as good as a dozen men-at-arms, but somehow she had not been the same woman since little Bernard had fallen sick.'

There was no one in the company with whom Grisell was very sorry to part, for though Dame Gresford had been kind to her, it had been merely the attending to the needs of a charge, not showing her any affection, and she had shrunk from the eyes of so large a party.

When she came down early into the hall,

her father's half-dozen retainers were taking their morning meal at one end of a big board, while a manchet of bread and a silver cup of ale was ready for each of them at the other, and her father while swallowing his was in deep conversation over northern politics with the courteous Earl, who had come down to speed his guests. As she passed the retainers she heard, 'Here comes our Grisly Grisell,' and a smothered laugh, and in fact 'Grisly Grisell' continued to be her name among the free-spoken people of the north. The Earl broke off, bowed to her, and saw that she was provided, breaking into his conversation with the Baron, evidently much to the impatience of the latter; and again the polite noble came down to the door with her, and placed her on her palfrey, bidding her a kind farewell ere she rode

away with her father. It would be long before she met with such courtesy again. Her father called to his side his old, rugged-looking esquire Cuthbert Ridley, and began discussing with him what Lord Warwick had said, both wholly absorbed in the subject, and paying no attention to the girl who rode by the Baron's side, so that it was well that her old infantine training in horsemanship had come back to her.

She remembered Cuthbert Ridley, who had carried her about and petted her long ago, and, to her surprise, looked no older than he had done in those days when he had seemed to her infinitely aged. Indeed it was to him, far more than to her father, that she owed any attention or care taken of her on the journey. Her father was not unkind, but never seemed to recollect that she

needed any more care than his rough followers, and once or twice he and all his people rode off headlong over the fell at sight of a stag roused by one of their great deer-hounds. Then Cuthbert Ridley kept beside her, and when the ground became too rough for a New Forest pony and a hand unaccustomed to northern ground, he drew up. She would probably—if not thrown and injured—have been left behind to feel herself lost on the moors. She minded the less his somewhat rude ejaculation, ‘Ho! Ho! South! South!’ Forgot how to back a horse on rough ground. Eh? And what a poor soft-paced beast! Only fit to ride on my lady’s pilgrimage or in a State procession.’

(He said Gang, but neither the Old English nor the northern dialect could be understood by the writer or the reader, and must be taken for granted.)

‘They are all gone!’ responded Grisell, rather frightened.

‘Never guessed you were not among them,’ replied Ridley. ‘Why, my lady would be among the foremost, in at the death belike, if she did not cut the throat of the quarry.’

Grisell could well believe it, but, used to gentle nuns, she shuddered a little as she asked what they were to do next.

‘Turn back to the track, and go softly on till my lord comes up with us,’ answered Ridley. ‘Or you might be fain to rest under a rock for a while.’

The rest was far from unwelcome, and Grisell sat down on a mossy stone while Ridley gathered bracken for her shelter, and presently even brought her a branch or two of whortle-berries.

She felt that she had a friend, and was pleased when he began to talk of how he remembered her long ago.

‘Ah! I mind you, a little fat ball of a thing, when you were fetched home from Herring Dick’s house, how you used to run after the dogs like a kitten after her tail, and used to crave to be put up on old Black Durham’s back.’

‘I remember Black Durham! Had he not a white star on his forehead?’

‘A white blaze sure enough.’

‘Is he at the tower still? I did not see him in the plump of spears.’

‘No, no, poor beast. He broke his leg four years ago come Martinmas, in a rabbit-hole on Berwick Law, last raid that we made, and I tarried to cut his throat with my dagger—though it went

to my heart, for his good old eyes looked at me like Christians, and my lord told me I was a fool for my pains, for the Elliots were hard upon us ; but I could not leave him to be a mark for them, and I was up with the rest in time, though I had to cut down the foremost lad.'

Certainly 'home' would be very unlike the experience of Grisell's education.

Ridley gave her a piece of advice. 'Do not be daunted at my lady; her bark is ever worse than her bite, and what she will not bear with is the seeming cowed before her. She is all the sharper with her tongue now that her heart is sore for Master Bernard.'

'What ails my brother Bernard?' then asked Grisell anxiously.

'The saints may know, but no man does, unless

it was that Crooked Nan of Strait Glen overlooked the poor child,' returned the esquire. 'Ever since he fell into the red beck he hath done nought but peak and pine, and be twisted with cramps and aches, with sores breaking out on him; though there's a honeycomb-stone from Roker over his bed. My lord took out all the retainers to lay hold on Crooked Nan, but she got scent of it no doubt, for Jack of Burhill took his oath that he had seen a muckle hare run up the glen that morn, and when we got there she was not to be seen or heard of. We have heard of her in the Gilsland ground, where they would all the sooner see a fine young lad of Whitburn crippled and a mere misery to see or hear.'

Grisell was quite as ready to believe in witchcraft as was the old squire, and to tremble at

their capacities for mischief. She asked what nunneries were near, and was disappointed to find nothing within easy reach. St. Cuthbert's diocese had not greatly favoured womankind, and Whitby was far away.

By and by her father came back, the thundering tramp of the horses being heard in time enough for her to spring up and be mounted again before he came in sight, the yeomen carrying the antlers and best portions of the deer.

‘Left out, my wench,’ he shouted. ‘We must mount you better. Ho! Cuthbert, thou a squire of dames? Ha! ha!’

‘The maid could not be left to lose herself on the fells,’ muttered the squire, rather ashamed of his courtesy.

‘She must get rid of nunnery breeding. We

want no trim and dainty lassies here,' growled her father. 'Look you, Ridley, that horse of Hob's——' and the rest was lost in a discussion on horseflesh.

Long rides, which almost exhausted Grisell, and halts in exceedingly uncomfortable hostels, where she could hardly obtain tolerable seclusion, brought her at last within reach of home. There was a tall church tower and some wretched hovels round it. The Lord of Whitburn halted, and blew his bugle with the peculiar note that signified his own return, then all rode down to the old peel, the outline of which Grisell saw with a sense of remembrance, against the gray sea-line, with the little breaking, glancing waves, which she now knew herself to have unconsciously wanted and missed for years past.

Whitburn Tower stood on the south side, on a steep cliff overlooking the sea. The peel tower itself looked high and strong, but to Grisell, accustomed to the widespread courts of the great castles and abbeys of the south, the circuit of out-buildings seemed very narrow and cramped, for truly there was need to have no more walls than could be helped for the few defenders to guard.

All was open now, and under the arched gateway, with the portcullis over her head, fitly framing her, stood the tall, gaunt figure of the lady, grayer, thinner, more haggard than when Grisell had last seen her, and beside her, leaning on a crutch, a white-faced boy, small and stunted for six years old.

‘Ha, dame! Ha, Bernard; how goes it?’ shouted the Baron in his gruff, hoarse voice.

‘He willed to come down to greet you, though he cannot hold your stirrup,’ said the mother, ‘You are soon returned. Is all well with Rob?’

‘O ay, I found Thorslan of Danby and a plump of spears on the way to the Duke of York at Windsor. They say he will need all his following if the Beauforts put it about that the King has recovered as much wit as ever he had. So I e’en sent Rob on with him, and came back so as to be ready in case there’s a call for me. Soh! Berney; on thy feet again? That’s well, my lad; but we’ll have thee up the steps.’

He seemed quite to have forgotten the presence of Grisell, and it was Cuthbert Ridley who helped her off her horse, but just then little Bernard in his father’s arms exclaimed—

‘Black nun woman!’

‘By St. Cuthbert!’ cried the Baron, ‘I mind me! Here, wench! I have brought back the maid in her brother’s stead.’

And as Grisell, in obedience to his call, threw back her veil, Bernard screamed, ‘Ugsome wench, send her away!’ threw his arms round his father’s neck and hid his face with a babyish gesture.

‘Saints have mercy!’ cried the mother, ‘thou hast not mended much since I saw thee last. They that marred thee had best have kept thee. Whatever shall we do with the maid?’

‘Send her away, the loathly thing,’ reiterated the boy, lifting up his head from his father’s shoulder for another glimpse, which produced a puckering of the face in readiness for crying.

‘Nay, nay, Bernard,’ said Ridley, feeling for the poor girl and speaking up for her when no one

else would. 'She is your sister, and you must be a fond brother to her, for an ill-nurtured lad spoilt her poor face when it was as fair as your own. Kiss your sister like a good lad, and——'

'No! no!' shouted Bernard. 'Take her away. I hate her.' He began to cry and kick.

'Get out of his sight as fast as may be,' commanded the mother, alarmed by her sickly darling's paroxysm of passion.

Grisell, scarce knowing where to go, could only allow herself to be led away by Ridley, who, seeing her tears, tried to comfort her in his rough way. 'Tis the petted bairn's way, you see, mistress—and my lady has no thought save for him. He will get over it soon enough when he learns your gentle convent-bred condition.'

Still the cry of 'Grisly Grisell,' picked up as if

by instinct or by some echo from the rear of the escort, rang in her ears in the angry fretful voice of the poor little creature towards whom her heart was yearning. Even the two women-servants there were, no more looked at her askance, as they took her to a seat in the hall, and consulted where my lady would have her bestowed. She was wiping away bitter tears as she heard her only friend Cuthbert settle the matter. 'The chamber within the solar is the place for the noble damsels.'

'That is full of old armour, and dried herrings, and stockfish.'

'Move them then! A fair greeting to give to my lord's daughter.'

There was some further muttering about a bed, and Grisell sprang up. 'Oh, hush! hush! I can

sleep on a cloak ; I have done so for many nights. Only let me be no burthen. Show me where I can go to be an anchoress, since they will not have me in a convent or anywhere,' and bitterly she wept.

'Peace, peace, lady,' said the squire kindly. 'I will deal with these ill-tongued lasses. Shame on them! Go off, and make the chamber ready, or I'll find a scourge for you. And as to my lady—she is wrapped up in the sick bairn, but she has only to get used to you to be friendly enough.'

'O what a hope in a mother,' thought poor Grisell. 'O that I were at Wilton or some nunnery, where my looks would be pardoned! Mother Avice, dear mother, what wouldst thou say to me now!'

The peel tower had been the original building,

and was still as it were the citadel, but below had been built the very strong but narrow castle court, containing the stables and the well, and likewise the hall and kitchen—which were the dwelling and sleeping places of the men of the household, excepting Cuthbert Ridley, who being of gentle blood, would sit above the salt, and had his quarters with Rob when at home in the tower. The solar was a room above the hall, where was the great box-bed of the lord and lady, and a little bed for Bernard.

Entered through it, in a small turret, was a chamber designed for the daughters and maids, and this was rightly appropriated by Ridley to the Lady Grisell. The two women-servants—Bell and Madge—were wives to the cook and the castle smith, so the place had been disused and made a

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receptacle for drying fish, fruit, and the like. Thus the sudden call for its use provoked a storm of murmurs in no gentle voices, and Grisell shrank into a corner of the hall, only wishing she could efface herself.

And as she looked out on the sea from her narrow window, it seemed to her dismally gray, moaning, restless, and dreary.

CHAPTER X

COLD WELCOME

Seek not for others to love you,
But seek yourself to love them best,
And you shall find the secret true,
Of love and joy and rest.

I. WILLIAMS.

To lack beauty was a much more serious misfortune in the Middle Ages than at present. Of course it was probable that there might be a contract of marriage made entirely irrespective of attractiveness, long before the development of either of the principal parties concerned; but even then the rude, open-spoken husband would consider himself absolved from any atten-

tion to an ill-favoured wife, and the free tongues of her surroundings would not be slack to make her aware of her defects. The cloister was the refuge of the unmarried woman, if of gentle birth as a nun, if of a lower grade as a lay-sister; but the fifteenth century was an age neither of religion nor of chivalry. Dowers were more thought of than devotion in convents as elsewhere. Whitby being one of the oldest and grandest foundations was sure to be inaccessible to a high-born but unportioned girl, and Grisell in her sense of loneliness saw nothing before her but to become an anchoress, that is to say, a female hermit, such as generally lived in strict seclusion under shelter of the Church.

‘There at least,’ thought poor Grisell, ‘there would be none to sting me to the heart with

those jeering eyes of theirs. And I might feel in time that God and His Saints loved me, and not long for my father and mother, and oh! my poor little brother—yes, and Leonard Copeland, and Sister Avice, and the rest. But would Sister Avice call this devotion? Nay, would she not say that these cruel eyes and words are a cross upon me, and I must bear them and love in spite—at least till I be old enough to choose for myself?’

She was summoned to supper, and this increased the sense of dreariness, for Bernard screamed that the grisly one should not come near him, or he would not eat, and she had to take her meal of dried fish and barley bread in the wide chimney corner, where there always was a fire at every season of the year.

Her chamber, which Cuthbert Ridley's exertions had compelled the women to prepare for her, was—as seen in the light of the long evening—a desolate place, within a turret, opening from the solar, or chamber of her parents and Bernard, the loophole window devoid of glass, though a shutter could be closed in bad weather, the walls circular and of rough, untouched, unconcealed stone, a pallet bed—the only attempt at furniture, except one chest—and Grisell's own mails tumbled down anyhow, and all pervaded by an ancient and fishy smell. She felt too down-hearted even to creep out and ask for a pitcher of water. She took a long look over the gray, heaving sea, and tired as she was, it was long before she could pray and cry herself to sleep,

and accustomed as she was to convent beds, this one appeared to be stuffed with raw apples, and she awoke with aching bones.

Her request for a pitcher or pail of water was treated as southland finery, for those who washed at all used the horse trough, but fortunately for her Cuthbert Ridley heard the request. He had been enough in the south in attendance on his master to know how young damsels lived, and what treatment they met with, and he was soon rating the women in no measured terms for the disrespect they had presumed to show to the Lady Grisell, encouraged by the neglect of her parents. The Lord of Whitburn, appearing on the scene at the moment, backed up his retainer, and made it plain that he intended his daughter to be

respected and obeyed, and the grumbling women had to submit. Nor did he refuse to acknowledge, on Ridley's representation, that Grisell ought to have an attendant of her own, and the lady of the castle, coming down with Bernard clinging to her skirt with one hand, and leaning on his crutch, consented. 'If the maid was to be here, she must be treated fitly, and Bell and Madge had enough to do without convent-bred fancies.'

So Cuthbert descended the steep path to the ravine where dwelt the fisher folk, and came back with a girl barefooted, bareheaded, with long, streaming, lint-white locks, and the scantiest of garments, crying bitterly with fright, and almost struggling to go back. She was the orphan remnant of a family drowned in the bay, and

was a burthen on her fisher kindred, who were rejoiced thus to dispose of her.

She sobbed the more at sight of the grisly lady, and almost screamed when Grisell smiled and tried to take her by the hand. Ridley fairly drove her upstairs, step by step, and then shut her in with his young lady, when she sank on the floor and hid her face under all her bleached hair.

‘Poor little thing,’ thought Grisell; ‘it is like having a fresh-caught sea-gull. She is as forlorn as I am, and more afraid!’

So she begun to speak gently and coaxingly, begging the girl to look up, and assuring her that she would not be hurt. Grisell had a very soft and persuasive voice. Her chief misfortune as regarded her appearance was that the muscles

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of one cheek had been so drawn that though she smiled sweetly with one side of her face, the other was contracted and went awry, so that when the kind tones had made the girl look up for a moment, the next she cried, 'O don't—don't! Holy Mary, forbid the spell!'

'I have no spells, my poor maid; indeed I am only a poor girl, a stranger here in my own home. Come, and do not fear me.'

'Madge said you had witches' marks on your face,' sobbed the child.

'Only the marks of gunpowder,' said Grisell.

'Listen, I will tell thee what befell me.'

Gunpowder seemed to be quite beyond all experience of Whitburn nature, but the history of the catastrophe gained attention, and the girl's terror abated, so that Grisell could ask her name,

which was Thora, and learning, too, that she had led a hard life since her granny died, and her uncle's wife beat her, and made her carry heavy loads of sea-weed when it froze her hands, besides a hundred other troubles. As to knowing any kind of feminine art, she was as ignorant as if the rough and extremely dirty woollen garment she wore, belted round with a strip of leather, had grown upon her; and though Grisell's own stock of garments was not extensive, she was obliged, for very shame, to dress this strange attendant in what she could best spare, as well as, in spite of sobs and screams, to wash her face, hands, and feet, and it was wonderful how great a difference this made in the wild creature by the time the clang of the castle bell summoned all to the mid-day meal, when, as before, Bernard professed not

to be able to look at his sister, but when she had retreated he was seen spying at her through his fingers, with great curiosity.

Afterwards she went up to her mother to beg for a few necessaries for herself and for her maid, and to offer to do some spinning. She was not very graciously answered; but she was allowed an old frayed horse-cloth on which Thora might sleep, and for the rest she might see what she could find under the stairs in the turret, or in the chest in the hall window.

The broken, dilapidated fragments which seemed to Grisell mere rubbish were treasures and wonders to Thora, and out of them she picked enough to render her dreary chamber a very few degrees more habitable. Thora would sleep there, and certainly their relations were reversed, for carrying

water was almost the only office she performed at first, since Grisell had to dress her, and teach her to keep herself in a tolerable state of neatness, and likewise how to spin, luring her with the hope of spinning yarn for a new dress for herself. As to prayers, her mind was a mere blank, though she said something that sounded like a spell except that it began with 'Pater.' She did not know who made her, and entirely believed in Niord and Rana, the storm-gods of Norseland. Yet she had always been to mass every Sunday morning. So went all the family at the castle as a matter of course, but except when the sacring-bell hushed them, the Baron freely discussed crops or fish with the tenants, and the lady wrangled about dues of lambs, eggs, and fish. Grisell's attention was a new thing, and the

priest's pronunciation was so defective to her ear that she could hardly follow.

That first week Grisell had plenty of occupation in settling her room and training her uncouth maid, who proved a much more apt scholar than she had expected, and became devoted to her like a little faithful dog.

No one else took much notice of either, except that at times Cuthbert Ridley showed himself to be willing to stand up for her. Her father was out a great deal, hunting or hawking or holding consultations with neighbouring knights or the men of Sunderland. Her mother, with the loudest and most peremptory of voices, ruled over the castle, ordered the men on their guards and at the stables, and the cook, scullions, and other servants, but without much good effect

as household affairs were concerned, for the meals were as far removed from the delicate, dainty serving of the simplest fast-day meal at Wilton as from the sumptuous plenty and variety of Warwick house, and Bernard often cried and could not eat. She longed to make up for him one of the many appetising possets well known at Wilton, but her mother and Ralf the cook both scouted her first proposal. They wanted no south-bred meddlers over their fire.

However, one evening when Bernard had been fretful and in pain, the Baron had growled out that the child was cockered beyond all bearing, and the mother had flown out at the unnatural father, and on his half laughing at her doting ways, had actually rushed across with clenched fist to box his ears ; he had muttered that the pining brat

and shrewish dame made the house no place for him, and wandered out to the society of his horses. Lady Whitburn, after exhaling her wrath in abuse of him and all around, carried the child up to his bed. There he was moaning, and she trying to soothe him, when, darkness having put a stop to Grisell's spinning, she went to her chamber with Thora. In passing, the moaning was still heard, and she even thought her mother was crying. She ventured to approach and ask, 'Fares he no better? If I might rub that poor leg.'

But Bernard peevishly hid his face and whined, 'Go away, Grisly,' and her mother exclaimed, 'Away with you, I have enough to vex me here without you.'

She could only retire as fast as possible, and

her tears ran down her face as in the long summer twilight she recited the evening offices, the same in which Sister Avice was joining in Wilton chapel. Before they were over she heard her father come up to bed, and in a harsh and angered voice bid Bernard to be still. There was stillness for some little time, but by and by the moaning and sobbing began again, and there was a jangling between the gruff voice and the shrill one, now thinner and weaker. Grisell felt that she must try again, and crept out. 'If I might rub him a little while, and you rest, Lady Mother. He cannot see me now.'

She prevailed, or rather the poor mother's utter weariness and dejection did, together with the father's growl, 'Let her bring us peace if she can.'

Lady Whitburn let her kneel down by the bed, and guided her hand to the aching thigh.

‘Soft! Soft! Good! Good!’ muttered Bernard presently. ‘Go on!’

Grisell had acquired something of that strange almost magical touch of Sister Avice, and Bernard lay still under her hand. Her mother, who was quite worn out, moved to her own bed, and fell asleep, while the snores of the Baron proclaimed him to have been long appeased. The boy, too, presently was breathing softly, and Grisell’s attitude relaxed, as her prayers and her dreams mingled together; and by and by, what she thought was the organ in Wilton chapel, and the light of St. Edith’s taper, proved to be the musical rush of the incoming tide, and the golden sunrise over the sea, while all lay sound asleep around

her, and she ventured gently to withdraw into her own room.

That night was Grisell's victory, though Bernard still held aloof from her all the ensuing day, when he was really the better and fresher for his long sleep; but at bed-time, when as usual the pain came on, he wailed for her to rub him, and as it was still daylight, and her father had gone out in one of the boats to fish, she ventured on singing to him, as she rubbed, to his great delight and still greater boon to her yearning heart. Even by day, as she sat at work, the little fellow limped up to her, and said, 'Grisly, sing that again,' staring hard in her face as she did so.

CHAPTER XI

BERNARD

I do remember an apothecary,—
And hereabouts he dwells.

SHAKESPEARE, *Romco and Juliet*.

BERNARD'S affection was as strong as his aversion had been. Poor little boy, no one had been accustomed enough to sickly children, or indeed to children at all, to know how to make him happy or even comfortable, and his life had been sad and suffering ever since the blight that had fallen on him, through either the evil eye of Nan the witch, or through his fall into a freezing stream. His brother, a great strong lad, had teased and bullied him ; his father, though not

actually unkind except when wearied by his fretfulness, held him as a miserable failure, scarcely worth rearing; his mother, though her pride was in her elder son, and the only softness in her heart for the little one, had been so rugged and violent a woman all the years of her life, and had so despised all gentler habits of civilisation, that she really did not know how to be tender to the child who was really her darling. Her infants had been nursed in the cottages, and not returned to the castle till they were old enough to rough it—indeed they were soon sent off to be bred up elsewhere. Some failure in health, too, made it harder for her to be patient with an ailing child, and her love was apt to take the form of anger with his petulance or even with his suffering, or else of fierce battles with her husband in his defence.

The comfort would have been in burning Crooked Nan, but that beldame had disposed of herself out of reach, though Lady Whitburn still cherished the hope of forcing the Gilsland Dacres or the Percies to yield the woman up. Failing this, the boy had been shown to a travelling friar, who had promised cure through the relics he carried about; but Bernard had only screamed at him, and had been none the better.

And now the little fellow had got over the first shock, he found that 'Grisly,' as he still called her, but only as an affectionate abbreviation, was the only person who could relieve his pain, or amuse him, in the whole castle; and he was incessantly hanging on her. She must put him to bed and sing lullabies to him, she must rub his limbs when they ached with rheumatic pains;

hers was the only hand which might touch the sores that continually broke out, and he would sit for long spaces on her lap, sometimes stroking down the scar and pitying it with 'Poor Grisly; when I am a man, I will throw down my glove, and fight with that lad, and kill him.'

'O nay, nay, Bernard; he never meant to do me evil. He is a fair, brave, good boy.'

'He scorned and ran away from you. He is mansworn and recreant,' persisted Bernard. 'Rob and I will make him say that you are the fairest of ladies.'

'O nay, nay. That he could not.'

'But you are, you are—on *this* side—mine own Grisly,' cried Bernard, whose experiences of fair ladies had not been extensive, and who curled himself on her lap, giving unspeakable rest and

joy to her weary, yearning spirit, as she pressed him to her breast. 'Now, a story, a story,' he entreated, and she was rich in tales from Scripture history and legends of the Saints, or she would sing her sweet monastic hymns and chants, as he nestled in her lap.

The mother had fits of jealousy at the exclusive preference, and now and then would rail at Grisell for cosseting the bairn and keeping him a helpless baby; or at Bernard for leaving his mother for this ill-favoured, useless sister, and would even snatch away the boy, and declare that she wanted no one to deal with him save herself; but Bernard had a will of his own, and screamed for his Grisly, throwing himself about in such a manner that Lady Whitburn was forced to submit; and quite to the alarm of her daughter,

on one of these occasions she actually burst into a flood of tears, sobbing loud and without restraint. Indeed, though she hotly declared that she ailed nothing, there was a lassitude about her that made it a relief to have the care of Bernard taken off her hands ; and the Baron's grumbling at disturbed nights made the removal of Bernard's bed to his sister's room generally acceptable.

Once, when Grisell was found to have taught both him and Thora the English version of the Lord's Prayer and Creed, and moreover to be telling him the story of the Gospel, there came, no one knew from where, an accusation which made her father tramp up and say, 'Mark you, wench, I'll have no Lollards here.'

'Lollards, sir ; I never saw a Lollard !' said Grisell trembling.

‘Where, then, didst learn all this, making holy things common?’

‘We all learnt it at Wilton, sir, from the reverend mothers and the holy father.’

The Baron was fairly satisfied, and muttered that if the bairn was fit only for a shaveling, it might be all right.

Poor child, would he ever be fit for that or any occupation of manhood? However, Grisell had won permission to compound broths, cakes, and possets for him, over the hall fire, for the cook and his wife would not endure her approach to their domain, and with great reluctance allowed her the materials. Bernard watched her operations with intense delight and amusement, and tasted with a sense of triumph and appetite, calling on his mother to taste likewise; and she

on whose palate semi-raw or over-roasted joints had begun to pall, allowed that the nuns had taught Grisell something.

And thus as time went on Grisell led no unhappy life. Every one around was used to her scars, and took no notice of them, and there was nothing to bring the thought before her, except now and then when a fishwife's baby, brought to her for cure, would scream at her. She never went beyond the castle except to mass, now and then to visit a sick person, and to seek some of the herbs of which she had learnt the use, and then she was always attended by Thora and Ridley, who made a great favour of going.

Bernard had given her the greater part of his heart, and she soothed his pain, made his hours happy, and taught him the knowledge she brought

from the convent. Her affections were with him, and though her mother could scarcely be said to love her, she tolerated and depended more and more on the daughter who alone could give her help or solace.

That was Grisell's second victory, when she was actually asked to compound a warm, relishing, hot bowl for her father when he was caught in a storm and came in drenched and weary.

She wanted to try on her little brother the effect of one of Sister Avise's ointments, which she thought more likely to be efficacious than melted mutton fat, mixed with pounded worms, scrapings from the church bells, and boiled seaweed ; but some of her ingredients were out of reach, unless they were attainable at Sunderland, and she obtained permission to ride thither under

the escort of Cuthbert Ridley, and was provided with a small purse—the proceeds of the Baron's dues out of the fishermen's sales of herrings.

She was also to purchase a warm gown and mantle for her mother, and enough of cloth to afford winter garments for Bernard; and a steady old pack-horse carried the bundles of yarn to be exchanged for these commodities, since the Whitburn household possessed no member dexterous with the old disused loom, and the itinerant weavers did not come that way—it was whispered because they were afraid of the fisher folk, and got but sorry cheer from the lady.

The commissions were important, and Grisell enjoyed the two miles ride along the cliffs of Roker Bay, looking up at the curious caverns in the rock, and seeking for the very strangely-

formed stones, supposed to have magic power, which fell from the rock. In the distance beyond the river to the southward, Ridley pointed to the tall square tower of Monks Wearmouth Church dominating the great monastery around it, which had once held the venerable Bede, though to both Ridley and Grisell he was only a name of a patron saint.

The harbour formed by the mouth of the river Wear was a marvel to Grisell, crowded as it was with low, squarely - rigged and gaily - coloured vessels of Holland, Friesland, and Flanders—very new sights to one best acquainted with Noah's ark or St. Peter's ship in illuminations.

‘Sunderland is a noted place for shipbuilding,’ said Ridley. ‘Moreover, these come for wool, salt-fish, and our earth coal, and they bring us fine

cloth, linen, and stout armour. I am glad to see yonder Flemish ensign. If luck goes well with us, I shall get a fresh pair of gauntlets for my lord, straight from Gaunt, the place of gloves.'

'*Gant* for glove,' said Grisell.

'How? You speak French. Then you may aid me in chaffering, and I will straight to the Flemings, with whom I may do better than with Hodge of the Lamb. How now, here's a shower coming up fast!'

It was so indeed; a heavy cloud had risen quickly, and was already bursting overhead. Ridley hurried on, along a thoroughfare across salt marshes (now docks), but the speed was not enough to prevent their being drenched by a torrent of rain and hail before they reached the tall timbered houses of Wearmouth.

‘In good time!’ cried Ridley; ‘here’s the Poticary’s sign! You had best halt here at once.’

In front of a high-roofed house with a projecting upper story, hung a sign bearing a green serpent on a red ground, over a stall, open to the street, which the owner was sheltering with a deep canvas awning.

‘Hola, Master Lambert Groats,’ called Ridley. ‘Here’s the young demoiselle of Whitburn would have some dealings with you.’

Jumping off his horse, he helped Grisell to dismount just as a small, keen-faced, elderly man in dark gown came forward, doffing his green velvet cap, and hoping the young lady would take shelter in his poor house.

Grisell, glancing round the little booth, was aware of sundry marvellous curiosities hanging

round, such as a dried crocodile, the shells of tortoises, of sea-urchins and crabs, all to her eyes most strange and weird ; but Master Lambert was begging her to hasten in at once to his dwelling-room beyond, and let his wife dry her clothes ; and at once there came forward a plump, smooth, pleasant-looking personage, greatly his junior, dressed in a tight gold-edged cap over her fair hair, a dark skirt, black bodice, bright apron, and white sleeves, curtsying low, but making signs to invite the newcomers to the fire on the hearth. ‘My housewife is stone deaf,’ explained their host, ‘and she knows no tongue save her own, and the unspoken language of courtesy, but she is rejoiced to welcome the demoiselle. Ah, she is drenched ! Ah, if she will honour my poor house !’

The wife curtsied low, and by hospitable signs prayed the demoiselle to come to the fire, and take off her wet mantle. It was a very comfortable room, with a wide chimney, and deep windows glazed with thick circles of glass, the spaces between leaded around in diamond panes, through which vine branches could dimly be seen flapping and beating in the storm. A table stood under one with various glasses and vessels of curious shapes, and a big book, and at the other was a distaff, a work-basket, and other feminine gear. Shelves with pewter dishes, and red, yellow, and striped crocks, surrounded the walls; there was a savoury cauldron on the open fire. It was evidently sitting-room and kitchen in one, with offices beyond, and Grisell was at once installed in a fine carved chair by the fire—a

more comfortable seat than had ever fallen to her share.

‘Look you here, mistress,’ said Ridley; ‘you are in safe quarters here, and I will leave you awhile, take the horses to the hostel, and do mine errands across the river—’tis not fit for you—and come back to you when the shower is over, and you can come and chaffer for your woman’s gear.’

From the two good hosts the welcome was decided, and Grisell was glad to have time for consultation. An Apothecary of those days did not rise to the dignity of a leech, but was more like the present owner of a chemist’s shop, though a chemist then meant something much more abstruse, who studied occult sciences, such as alchemy and astrology.

In fact, Lambert Groot, which was his real name, though English lips had made it Groats, belonged to one of the prosperous guilds of the great merchant city of Bruges; but he had offended his family by his determination to marry the deaf, and almost dumb, portionless orphan daughter of an old friend and contemporary, and to save her from the scorn and slights of his relatives—though she was quite as well-born as themselves—he had migrated to England, where Wearmouth and Sunderland had a brisk trade with the Low Countries. These cities enjoyed the cultivation of the period, and this room, daintily clean and fresh, seemed to Grisell more luxurious than any she had seen since the Countess of Warwick's. A silver bowl of warm soup, extracted from the *pot au feu*, was served to her by the Hausfrau, on a

little table, spread with a fine white cloth edged with embroidery, with an earnest gesture begging her to partake, and a slender Venice glass of wine was brought to her with a cake of wheaten bread. Much did Grisell wish she could have transferred such refreshing fare to Bernard. She ventured to ask 'Master Poticary' whether he sold 'Balsam of Egypt.' He was interested at once, and asked whether it were for her own use.

'Nay, good master, you are thinking of my face; but that was a burn long ago healed. It is for my poor little brother.'

Therewith Grisell and Master Groats entered on a discussions of symptoms, drugs, ointments, and ingredients, in which she learnt a good deal and perhaps disclosed more of Sister Avice's methods than Wilton might have approved. In

the midst the sun broke out gaily after the shower, and disclosed, beyond the window, a garden where every leaf and spray were glittering and glorious with their own diamond drops in the sunshine. A garden of herbs was a needful part of an apothecary's business, as he manufactured for himself all of the medicaments which he did not import from foreign parts, but this had been laid out between its high walls with all the care, taste, and precision of the Netherlander, and Grisell exclaimed in perfect ecstasy: 'Oh, the garden, the garden! I have seen nothing so fair and sweet since I left Wilton.'

Master Lambert was delighted, and led her out. There is no describing how refreshing was the sight to eyes after the bare, dry walls of the castle, and the tossing sea which the maiden had

not yet learnt to love. Nor was the garden dull, though meant for use. There was a well in the centre with roses trained over it, roses of the dark old damask kind, and the dainty musk, used to be distilled for the eyes, some flowers lingering still; there was the brown dittany or fraxinella, whose dried blossoms are phosphoric at night; delicate pink centaury, good for ague; purple mallows, good for wounds; leopard's bane with yellow blossoms; many and many more old and dear friends of Grisell, redolent of Wilton cloister and Sister Avice; and she ran from one to the other quite transported, and forgetful of all the dignities of the young Lady of Whitburn, while Lambert was delighted, and hoped she would come again when his lilies were in bloom.

So went the time till Ridley returned, and

when the price was asked of the packet of medicaments prepared for her, Lambert answered that the value was fully balanced by what he had learnt from the lady. This, however, did not suit the honour of the Dacres, and Grisell, as well as her squire, who looked offended, insisted on leaving two gold crowns in payment. The Vrow kissed her hand, putting into it the last sprays of roses, which Grisell cherished in her bosom.

She was then conducted to a booth kept by a Dutchman, where she obtained the warm winter garments that she needed for her mother and brother, and likewise some linen, for the Lady of Whitburn had never been housewife enough to keep up a sufficient supply for Bernard, and Grisell was convinced that the cleanliness which the nuns had taught her would mitigate his

troubles. With Thora to wash for her she hoped to institute a new order of things.

Much pleased with her achievements she rode home. She was met there by more grumbling than satisfaction. Her father had expected more coin to send to Robert, who, like other absent youths, called for supplies.

The yeoman who had gone with him returned, bearing a scrap of paper with the words :—

‘MINE HONOURED LORD AND FATHER—I pray you to send me Black Lightning and xvj crowns by the hand of Ralf, and so the Saints have you in their keeping.—Your dutiful sonne,

‘ROBERT DACRE.’

xvj crowns was a heavy sum in those days, and Lord Whitburn vowed that he had never so called

on his father except when he was knighted, but those were the good old days when spoil was to be won in France. What could Rob want of such a sum?

‘Well-a-day, sir, the house of the Duke of York is no place to stint in. The two young Earls of March and of Rutland, as they call them, walk in red and blue and gold bravery, and chains of jewels, even like king’s sons, and none of the squires and pages can be behind them.’

‘Black Lightning too, my best colt, when I deemed the lad fitted out for years to come. I never sent home the like message to my father under the last good King Henry, but purveyed myself of a horse on the battlefield more than once. But those good old days are over, and lads think more of velvet and broidery than of lances and swords. Forsooth, their coats-of-arms are good to

wear on silk robes instead of helm and shield ; and as to our maids, give them their rein, and they spend more than all the rest on women's tawdry gear !'

Poor Grisell ! when she had bought nothing ornamental, and nothing for herself except a few needles.

However, in spite of murmurs, the xvj crowns were raised and sent away with Black Lightning ; and as time went on Grisell became more and more a needful person. Bernard was stronger, and even rode out on a pony, and the fame of his improvement brought other patients to the Lady Grisell from the vassals, with whom she dealt as best she might, successfully or the reverse ; while her mother, as her health failed, let fall more and more the reins of household rule.

CHAPTER XII

WORD FROM THE WARS

Above, below, the Rose of Snow,
Twined with her blushing face we spread.

GRAY'S *Bard*.

NEWS did not travel very fast to Whitburn, but one summer's day a tall, gallant, fair-faced esquire, in full armour of the cumbrous plate fashion, rode up to the gate, and blew the family note on his bugle.

‘My son! my son Rob,’ cried the lady, starting up from the cushions with which Grisell had furnished her settle.

Robert it was, who came clanking in, met by

his father at the gate, by his mother at the door, and by Bernard on his crutch in the rear, while Grisell, who had never seen this brother, hung back.

The youth bent his knee, but his outward courtesy did not conceal a good deal of contempt for the rude northern habits. 'How small and dark the hall is! My lady, how old you have grown! What, Bernard, still fit only for a shaven friar! Not shorn yet, eh? Ha! is that Grisell? St. Cuthbert to wit! Copeland has made a hag of her!'

'Tis a good maid none the less,' replied her father; the first direct praise that she had ever had from him, and which made her heart glow.

'She will ne'er get a husband, with such a visage as that,' observed Robert, who did not seem

to have learnt courtesy or forbearance yet on his travels; but he was soon telling his father what concerned them far more than the maiden's fate.

‘Sir, I have come on the part of the Duke of York to summon you. What, you have not heard? He needs, as speedily as may be, the arms of every honest man. How many can you get together?’

‘But what is it? How is it? Your Duke ruled the roast last time I heard of him.’

‘You know as little as my horse here in the north!’ cried Rob.

‘This I did hear last time there was a boat come in, that the Queen, that mother of mischief, had tried to lay hands on our Lord of Salisbury, and that he and your Duke of York had soundly beaten her and the men of Cheshire.’

‘Yea, at Blore Heath; and I thought to win my

spurs on the Copeland banner, but even as I was making my way to it and the recreant that bore it, I was stricken across my steel cap and dazed.'

'I'll warrant it,' muttered his father.

'When I could look up again all was changed, the banner nowhere in sight, but I kept my saddle, and cut down half a dozen rascaille after that.'

'Ha!' half incredulously, for it was a mere boy who boasted. 'That's my brave lad! And what then? More hopes of the spurs, eh?'

'Then what does the Queen do, but seeing that no one would willingly stir a lance against an old witless saint like King Harry, she gets a host together, dragging the poor man hither and thither with her, at Ludlow. Nay, we even heard the King was dead, and a mass was said for the repose of his soul; but with the morning what should we

see on the other side of the river Teme but the royal standard, and who should be under it but King Harry himself with his meek face and fair locks, twirling his fingers after his wont. So the men would have it that they had been gulled, and they fell away one after another, till there was nothing for it but for the Duke and his sons, and my Lords of Salisbury and Warwick and a few score more of us, to ride off as best we might, with Sir Andrew Trollope and his men after us, as hard as might be, so that we had to break up, and keep few together. I went with the Duke of York and young Lord Edmund into Wales, and thence in a bit of a fishing-boat across to Ireland. Ask me to fight in full field with twice the numbers, but never ask me to put to sea again ! There's nothing like it for taking heart and soul out of a man !'

‘I have crossed the sea often enow in the good old days, and known nothing worse than a qualm or two.’

‘That was to France,’ said his son. ‘This Irish Sea is far wider and far more tossing, I know for my own part. I’d have given a knight’s fee to any one who would have thrown me overboard. I felt like an empty bag! But once there, they could not make enough of us. The Duke had got their hearts before, and odd sort of hearts they are. I was deaf with the wild kernes shouting round about in their gibberish—such figures, too, as they are, with their blue cloaks, streaming hair, and long glibbes (moustaches), and the Lords of the Pale, as they call the English sort, are nigh about as wild and savage as the mere Irish. It was as much as my Lord Duke could do to hinder two of

them from coming to blows in his presence; and you should have heard them howl at one another. However, they are all with him, and a mighty force of them mean to go back with him to England. My Lord of Warwick came from Calais to hold counsel with him, and they have sworn to one another to meet with all their forces, and require the removal of the King's evil councillors; and my Lord Duke, with his own mouth, bade me go and summon his trusty Will Dacre of Whitburn—so he spake, sir—to be with him with all the spears and bowmen you can raise or call for among the neighbours. And it is my belief, sir, that he means not to stop at the councillors, but to put forth his rights. Hurrah for King Richard of the White Rose!’ ended Robert, throwing up his cap.

‘Nay, now,’ said his father. ‘I’d be loth to put down our gallant King Harry’s only son.’

‘No one breathes a word against King Harry,’ returned Robert, ‘no more than against a carven saint in a church, and he is about as much of a king as old stone King Edmund, or King Oswald, or whoever he is, over the porch. He is welcome to reign as long as he likes or lives, provided he lets our Duke govern for him, and rids the country of the foreign woman and her brat, who is no more hers than I am, but a mere babe of Westminster town carried into the palace when the poor King Harry was beside himself.’

‘Nay, now, Rob!’ cried his mother.

‘So ’tis said!’ sturdily persisted Rob. ‘’Tis well known that the King never looked at him the first time he was shown the little imp, and

next time, when he was not so distraught, he lifted up his hands and said he wotted nought of the matter. Hap what hap, King Harry may roam from Church to shrine, from Abbey to chantry, so long as he lists, but none of us will brook to be ruled or misruled by the foreign woman and the Beauforts in his name, nor reigned over by the French dame or the beggar's brat, and the traitor coward Beaufort, but be under our own noble Duke and the White Rose, the only badge that makes the Frenchman flee.'

The boy was scarcely fifteen, but his political tone, as of one who knew the world, made his father laugh and say, 'Hark to the cockerel crowing loud. Spurs forsooth!'

'The Lords Edward and Edmund are knighted,' grunted Rob, 'and there's but few years betwixt us.'

‘But a good many earldoms and lands,’ said the Baron. ‘Hadst spoken of being out of pagedom, ’twere another thing.’

‘You are coming, sir,’ cried Rob, willing to put by the subject. ‘You are coming to see how I can win honours.’

‘Ay, ay,’ said his father. ‘When Nevil calls, then must Dacre come, though his old bones might well be at rest now. Salisbury and Warwick taking to flight like attainted traitors to please the foreign woman, saidst thou? Then it is time true men were in the saddle.’

‘Well I knew you would say so, and so I told my lord,’ exclaimed Robert.

‘Thou didst, quotha? Without doubt the Duke was greatly reassured by thy testimony,’ said his father drily; while the mother, full of pride and

exultation in her goodly firstborn son, could not but exclaim, 'Daunt him not, my lord; he has done well thus to be sent home in charge.'

'*I* daunt him?' returned Lord Whitburn, in his teasing mood. 'By his own showing not a troop of Somerset's best horsemen could do that!'

Therewith more amicably, father and son fell to calculations of resources, which they kept up all through supper-time, and all the evening, till the names of Hobs, Wills, Dicks, and the like rang like a repeating echo in Grisell's ears. All through those long days of summer the father and son were out incessantly, riding from one tenant or neighbour to another, trying to raise men-at-arms and means to equip them if raised. All the dues on the herring-boats and the two whalers, on which Grisell had reckoned for the winter needs,

were pledged to Sunderland merchants for armour and weapons; the colts running wild on the moors were hastily caught, and reduced to a kind of order by rough breaking-in. The women of the castle and others requisitioned from the village toiled under the superintendence of the lady and Grisell at preparing such provision and equipments as were portable, such as dried fish, salted meat, and barley cakes, as well as linen, and there was a good deal of tailoring of a rough sort at jerkins, buff coats, and sword belts, not by any means the gentle work of embroidering pennons or scarves notable in romance.

‘Besides,’ scoffed Robert, ‘who would wear Grisly Grisell’s scarf!’

‘I would,’ manfully shouted Bernard; ‘I would cram it down the throat of that recreant Copeland.’

‘Oh! hush hush, Bernard,’ exclaimed Grisell, who was toiling with aching fingers at the repairs of her father’s greasy old buff coat. ‘Such things are, as Robin well says, for noble demoiselles with fair faces and leisure times like the Lady Margaret. And oh, Robin, you have never told me of the Lady Margaret, my dear mate at Amesbury.’

‘What should I know of your Lady Margarets and such gear?’ growled Robin, whose chivalry had not reached the point of caring for ladies.

‘The Lady Margaret Plantagenet, the young Lady Margaret of York,’ Grisell explained.

‘Oh! That’s what you mean, is it? There’s a whole troop of wenches at the high table in hall. They came after us with the Duchess as soon as we were settled in Trim Castle, but they are kept

as demure and mim as may be in my lady's bower ; and there's a pretty sharp eye kept on them. Some of the young squires who are fools enough to hanker after a few maids or look at the fairer ones get their noses well-nigh pinched off by Proud Cis's Mother of the Maids.'

'Then it would not avail to send poor Grisell's greetings by you.'

'I should like to see myself delivering them ! Besides, we shall meet my lord in camp, with no cumbrance of woman gear.'

Lord Whitburn's own castle was somewhat of a perplexity to him, for though his lady had once been quite sufficient captain for his scanty garrison, she was in too uncertain health, and what was worse, too much broken in spirit and courage, to be fit for the charge. He therefore decided on leaving

Cuthbert Ridley, who, in winter at least, was scarcely as capable of roughing it as of old, to protect the castle, with a few old or partly disabled men, who could man the walls to some degree, though it was unlikely that there would be any attack.

So on a May morning the old, weather-beaten Dacre pennon with its three crusading scallop-shells, was uplifted in the court, and round it mustered about thirty men, of whom eighteen had been raised by the baron, some being his own vassals, and others hired at Sunderland. The rest were volunteers—gentlemen, their younger sons, and their attendants—placing themselves under his leadership, either from goodwill to York and Nevil, or from love of enterprise and hope of plunder.

CHAPTER XIII

A KNOT

I would mine heart had caught that wound
And slept beside him rather !
I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend and marriage-ring
Forced on my life together.

E. B. BROWNING, *The Romaunt of the Page*.

LADIES were accustomed to live for weeks, months, nay, years, without news of those whom they had sent to the wars, and to live their life without them. The Lady of Whitburn did not expect to see her husband or son again till the summer campaign was over, and she was not at all uneasy about them, for the full armour of a gentleman.

had arrived at such a pitch of perfection that it was exceedingly difficult to kill him ; and such was the weight, that his danger in being overthrown was of never being able to get up, but lying there to be smothered, made prisoner, or killed, by breaking into his armour. The knights could not have moved at all under the weight if they had not been trained from infancy, and had nearly reduced themselves to the condition of great tortoises.

It was no small surprise when, very late on a July evening, when, though twilight still prevailed, all save the warder were in bed, and he was asleep on his post, a bugle-horn rang out the master's note, at first in the usual tones, then more loudly and impatiently. Hastening out of bed to her loop-hole window, Grisell saw a party beneath

the walls, her father's scallop-shells dimly seen above them, and a little in the rear, one who was evidently a prisoner.

The blasts grew fiercer, the warder and the castle were beginning to be astir, and when Grisell hurried into the outer room, she found her mother afoot and hastily dressing.

‘My lord! my lord! It is his note,’ she cried.

‘Father come home!’ shouted Bernard, just awake. ‘Grisley! Grisley! help me don my clothes.’

Lady Whitburn trembled and shook with haste, and Grisell could not help her very rapidly in the dark, with Bernard howling rather than calling for help all the time; and before she, still less Grisell, was fit for the public, her father's heavy

step was on the stairs, and she heard fragments of his words.

‘ All abed! We must have supper—ridden from Ayton since last baiting. Ay, got a prisoner— young Copeland—old one slain—great victory— Northampton. King taken—Buckingham and Egremont killed—Rob well—proud as a pyet. Ho, Grisell,’ as she appeared, ‘ bestir thyself. We be ready to eat a horse behind the saddle. Serve up as fast as may be.’

Grisell durst not stop to ask whether she had heard the word Copeland aright, and ran downstairs with a throbbing heart, just crossing the hall, where she thought she saw a figure bowed down, with hands over his face and elbows on his knees ; but she could not pause, and went on to the kitchen, where the peat fire was never allowed to

expire, and it was easy to stir it into heat. Whatever was cold she handed over to the servants to appease the hunger of the arrivals, while she broiled steaks, and heated the great perennial cauldron of broth with all the expedition in her power, with the help of Thora and the grumbling cook, when he appeared, angry at being disturbed.

Morning light was beginning to break before her toils were over, for the dozen hungry men pounced so suddenly in on her, and when she again crossed the hall, most of them were lying on the straw-bestrewn floor fast asleep. One she specially noticed, his long limbs stretched out as he lay on his side, his head on his arm, as if he had fallen asleep from extreme fatigue in spite of himself.

His light brown hair was short and curly, his

cheeks fair and ruddy, and all reminded her of Leonard Copeland as he had been those long years ago before her accident. Save for that, she would have been long ago his wife, she with her marred face the mate of that nobly fair countenance. How strange to remember. How she would have loved him, frank and often kind as she remembered him, though rough and impatient of restraint. What was that which his fingers had held till sleep had unclasped them? An ivory chessrook! Such was a favourite token of ladies to their true loves. What did it mean? Might she pause to pray a prayer over him as once hers—that all might be well with him, for she knew that in this unhappy war important captives were not treated as Frenchmen would have been as prisoners of war, but executed as traitors to their King.

She paused over him till a low sound and the bright eyes of one of the dogs warned her that all might in another moment be awake, and she fled up the stair to the solar, where her parents were both fast asleep, and across to her own room, where she threw herself on her bed, dressed as she was, but could not sleep for the multitude of strange thoughts that crowded over her in the increasing daylight.

By and by there was a stir, some words passed in the outer room, and then her mother came in.

‘Wake, Grisley. Busk and bonne for thy wedding-morning instantly. Copeland is to keep his troth to thee at once. The Earl of Warwick hath granted his life to thy father on that condition only.’

‘Oh, mother, is he willing?’ cried Grisell trembling.

‘What skills that, child? His hand was pledged, and he must fulfil his promise now that we have him.’

‘Was it troth? I cannot remember it,’ said Grisell.

‘That matters not. Your father’s plight is the same thing. His father was slain in the battle, so ’tis between him and us. Put on thy best clothes as fast as may be. Thou shalt have my wedding-veil and miniver mantle. Speed, I say. My lord has to hasten away to join the Earl on the way to London. He will see the knot tied beyond loosing at once.’

To dress herself was all poor Grisell could do in her bewilderment. Remonstrance was vain.

The actual marriage without choice was not so repugnant to all her feelings as to a modern maiden; it was the ordinary destiny of womanhood, and she had been used in her childhood to look on Leonard Copeland as her property; but to be forced on the poor youth instantly on his father's death, and as an alternative to execution, set all her maidenly feelings in revolt. Bernard was sitting up in bed, crying out that he could not lose his Grisley. Her mother was running backwards and forwards, bringing portions of her own bridal gear, and directing Thora, who was combing out her young lady's hair, which was long, of a beautiful brown, and was to be worn loose and flowing, in the bridal fashion. Grisell longed to kneel and pray, but her mother hurried her. 'My lord must not be kept waiting, there

would be time enough for prayer in the church.' Then Bernard, clamouring loudly, threw his arms round the thick old heavy silken gown that had been put on her, and declared that he would not part with his Grisley, and his mother tore him away by force, declaring that he need not fear, Copeland would be in no hurry to take her away, and again when she bent to kiss him he clung tight round her neck almost strangling her, and rumpling her tresses.

Ridley had come up to say that my lord was calling for the young lady, and it was he who took the boy off and held him in his arms, as the mother, who seemed endued with new strength by the excitement, threw a large white muffling veil over Grisell's head and shoulders, and led or rather dragged her down to the hall.

The first sounds she there heard were, 'Sir, I have given my faith to the Lady Eleanor of Audley, whom I love.'

'What is that to me? 'Twas a pre-contract to my daughter.'

'Not made by me nor her.'

'By your parents, with myself. You went near to being her death outright, marred her face for life, so that none other will wed her. What say you? Not hurt by your own will? Who said it was? What matters that?'

'Sir,' said Leonard, 'it is true that by mishap, nay, if you will have it so, by a child's inadvertence, I caused this evil chance to befall your daughter; but I deny, and my father denies likewise, that there was any troth plight between the maid and me. She will own the same if you ask

her. As I spake before, there was talk of the like kind between you, sir, and my father, and it was the desire of the good King that thus the families might be reconciled; but the contract went no farther, as the holy King himself owned when I gave my faith to the Lord Audley's daughter, and with it my heart.'

'Ay, we know that the Frenchwoman can make the poor fool of a King believe and avouch anything she choose! This is not the point. No more words, young man. Here stands my daughter; there is the rope. Choose—wed or hang.'

Leonard stood one moment with a look of agonised perplexity over his face. Then he said, 'If I consent, am I at liberty, free at once to depart?'

‘Ay,’ said Whitburn. ‘So you fulfil your contract, the rest is nought to me.’

‘I am then at liberty? Free to carry my sword to my Queen and King?’

‘Free.’

‘You swear it, on the holy cross?’

Lord Whitburn held up the cross hilt of his sword before him, and made oath on it that when once married to his daughter, Leonard Copeland was no longer his prisoner.

Grisell through her veil read on the youthful face a look of grief and renunciation; he was sacrificing his love to the needs of King and country, and his words chimed in with her conviction.

‘Sir, I am ready. If it were myself alone, I would die rather than be false to my love, but my

Queen needs good swords and faithful hearts, and I may not fail her. I am ready!’

‘It is well!’ said Lord Whitburn. ‘Ho, you there! Bring the horses to the door.’

Grisell, in all the strange suspense of that decision, had been thinking of Sir Gawaine, whose lines rang in her head, but that look of grief roused other feelings. Sir Gawaine had no other love to sacrifice.

‘Sir! sir!’ she cried, as her father turned to bid her mount the pillion behind Ridley. ‘Can you not let him go free without? I always looked to a cloister.’

‘That is for you and him to settle, girl. Obey me now, or it will be the worse for him and you.’

‘One word I would say,’ added the mother.

‘How far hath this matter with the Audley maid gone? There is no troth plight, I trow?’

‘No, by all that is holy, no. Would the lad not have pleaded it if there had been? No more dilly-dallying. Up on the horse, Grisley, and have done with it. We will show the young recreant how promises are kept in Durham County.’

He dragged rather than led his daughter to the door, and lifted her passively to the pillion seat behind Cuthbert Ridley. A fine horse, Copeland’s own, was waiting for him. He was allowed to ride freely, but old Whitburn kept close beside him, so that escape would have been impossible. He was in the armour in which he had fought, dimmed and dust-stained, but still glancing in the morning sun, which glittered on the sea, though a heavy western thunder-cloud, purple

in the sun, was rising in front of this strange bridal cavalcade.

It was overhead by the time the church was reached, and the heavy rain that began to fall caused the priest to bid the whole party come within for the part of the ceremony usually performed outside the west door.

It was very dark within. The windows were small and old, and filled with dusky glass, and the arches were low browed. Grisell's mufflings were thrown aside, and she stood as became a maiden bride, with all her hair flowing over her shoulders and long tresses over her face; but even without this, her features would hardly have been visible, as the dense cloud rolled overhead; and indeed so tall and straight was her figure that no one would have supposed her other than a fair young

spouse. She trembled a good deal, but was too much terrified and, as it were, stunned for tears, and she durst not raise her drooping head even to look at her bridegroom, though such light as came in shone upon his fair hair and was reflected on his armour, and on one golden spur that still he wore, the other no doubt lost in the fight.

All was done regularly. The Lord of Whitburn was determined that no ceremony that could make the wedlock valid should be omitted. The priest, a kind old man, but of peasant birth, and entirely subservient to the Dacres, proceeded to ask each of the pair when they had been assoiled, namely, absolved. Grisell, as he well knew, had been shriven only last Friday; Leonard muttered, 'Three days since, when I was dubbed knight, ere the battle.'

‘That suffices,’ put in the Baron impatiently.

‘On with you, Sir Lucas.’

The thoroughly personal parts of the service were in English, and Grisell could not but look up anxiously when the solemn charge was given to mention whether there was any lawful ‘letting’ to their marriage. Her heart bounded as it were to her throat when Leonard made no answer. But then what lay before him if he pleaded his promise!

It went on—those betrothal vows, dictated while the two cold hands were linked, his with a kind of limp passiveness, hers, quaking, especially as, in the old use of York, he took her ‘for laither for fairer’—laith being equivalent to loathly—‘till death us do part.’ And with failing heart, but still resolute heart, she faltered out her vow to

cleave to him 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness or health, and to be bonner (debonair or cheerful) and boughsome (obedient) till that final parting.'

The troth was plighted, and the silver mark—poor Leonard's sole available property at the moment—laid on the priest's book, as the words were said, 'with worldly cathel I thee endow,' and the ring, an old one of her mother's, was held on Grisell's finger. It was done, though, alas! the bridegroom could hardly say with truth, 'with my body I thee worship.'

Then followed the procession to the altar, the chilly hands barely touching one another, and the mass was celebrated, when Latin did not come home to the pair like English, though both fairly understood it. Grisell's feeling was by this time

concentrated in the one hope that she should be dutiful to the poor, unwilling bridegroom, far more to be pitied than herself, and that she should be guarded by God whatever befell.

It was over. Signing of registers was not in those days, but there was some delay, for the darkness was more dense than ever, the rush of furious hail was heard without, a great blue flash of intense light filled every corner of the church, the thunder pealed so sharply and vehemently overhead that the small company looked at one another and at the church, to ascertain that no stroke had fallen. Then the Lord of Whitburn, first recovering himself, cried, 'Come, sir knight, kiss your bride. Ha! where is he? Sir Leonard—here. Who hath seen him? Not vanished in yon flash! Eh?'

No, but the men without, cowering under the wall, deposed that Sir Leonard Copeland had rushed out, shouted to them that he had fulfilled the conditions and was a free man, taken his horse, and galloped away through the storm.

END OF VOL. I

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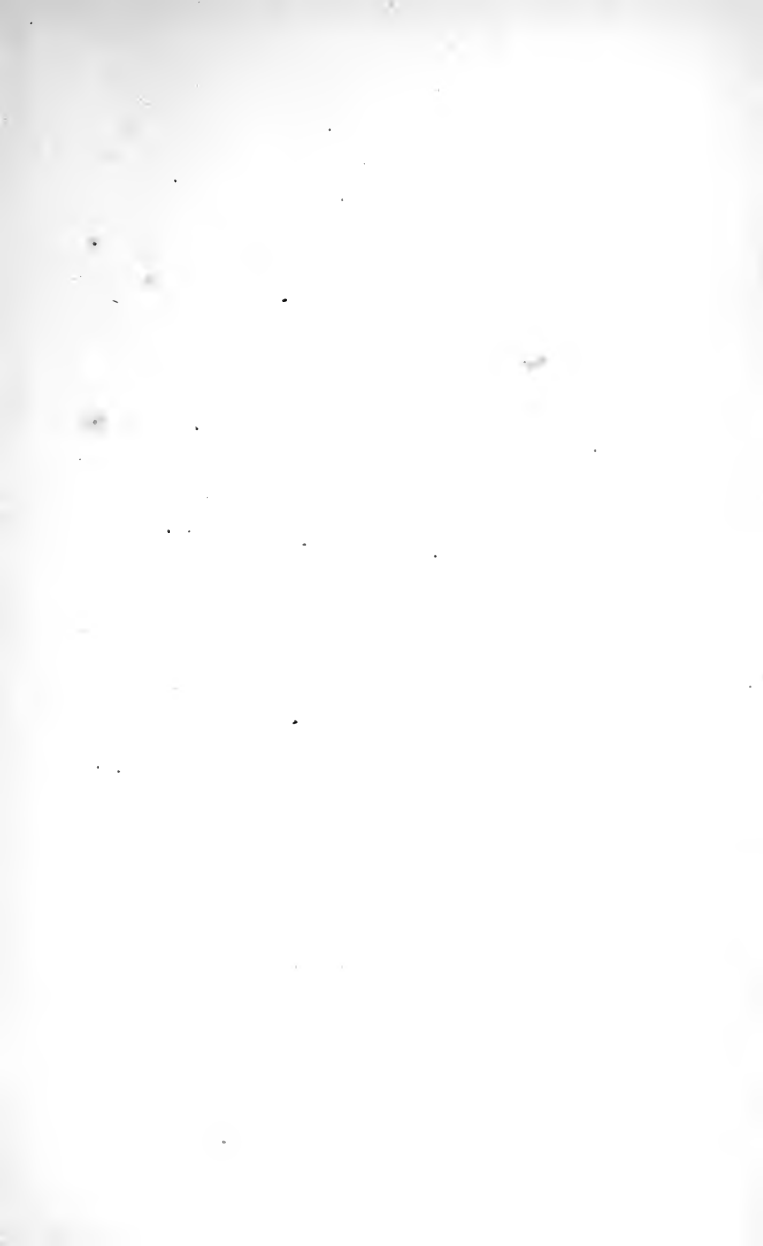
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